

Wednesday Lenten Message for March 18,2020 - Meditation by Gene Merlo

Passage text - *United Methodist Hymnal* #268:

O God our deliverer, you led your people of old through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land. Guide now the people of your church, that, following our Savior, we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

Kim has been preaching on the Sounds of the Passion. This meditation script will focus on light and darkness.

As many of you know, I am an optimist. Naturally drawn to the "light". In Genesis, God separated light from the darkness. It was good! Many of the gospels start with the Christmas story – the birth of Jesus – "The Light of the World". Easter morning many of you will get up for a sunrise service to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Spring flowers will be blooming, the weather getting warmer and each passing day the daylight hours will lengthen. God's presence in the light is visible for all to see!!!

Yet, before we get to the light of Easter morning, our Lenten journey leads us to Good Friday. The darkest day on the Christian calendar. To fully appreciate our Lenten journey to Easter (or for that matter our "Life Journey") we will travel through darkness. Metaphorically speaking we will travel through wilderness, wastelands, deserts, and rough country. Our life journey will include long sleepless nights, separation from loved ones, solitude, anxiety, loneliness, insecurity, fear, sickness and death.

A scene from the recent theater movie Mr. Rogers will help illustrate God's presence during our journey in the wilderness. For those who have not seen the movie it is worth a couple bucks to rent from red box or to stream it. I promise not to spoil the plot. Let's set the scene we will reflect upon:

- Fred Rogers goes to visit a man in his home. He is nearing the end of his earthly life.
- Earlier, the movie detailed the man's imperfections.
- The living room of the house has been transformed into an extended care area.
- After spending quality time, and just before leaving, Mr. Rogers hugs and whispers in the man's ear.
- It is clear the man is comforted and profoundly impacted by what was said privately.
- Mr. Rogers is followed out of the house by the man's son demanding to know what he said:
 - To the best of my recollection Mr. Rogers said: "I told him I was praying for him and asked that he prays for me. At this stage of his life your father is as close to God as a human can be while on earth"

As a reminder, our Lenten message stated: "As we walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come." With those words in mind, let's reflect on the scene from the movie Mr. Rogers as we walk through the wilderness of Lent:

- Put simply, the most important take away is: **God is most present in our darkest times.**
- Secondly, is the willingness of Mr. Rogers to not only offer but receive the gift of prayer.
 - It reflects Mr. Rogers confidence in the man's personal growth as he soldiers through darkness toward death.
 - Mr. Rogers demonstrated his own security as a Christian. He willingly requested and gratefully accepted prayer for himself.

- This movie scene is a guidebook for us as we and our family / friends travel through today's wilderness of health, financial and personal issues. Mr. Rogers demonstrated three simple things we all should do:
 - Be present in the lives of others.
 - Pray for people during their darkness.
 - We all can comfort people by separating darkness and light in another person's life.
- Lastly, Mr. Rogers, also an imperfect man, encourages a less than perfect man to pray for someone else, not himself at his darkest hour. This by itself is a Lenten lesson.
 - Hanging on that cross, Jesus, a perfect man, did not ask for his Father's assistance. He prayed for his crucifiers: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do".
 - Yes, in his darkest hour Christ prayed for others and set an example of humility for all for us to emulate.

Although we are comforted by the light and his resurrection on Easter morning, let us not forget God's presence in the darkness during our journey this Lent:

- In the Solitude and Loneliness – God is with us
- In the Cold and Dampness – God provides a warm embrace
- In anxiety with human insecurities – God comforts us
- In Sickness and even death – God gives strength
- In the darkness and wilderness – when you and your loved ones are suffering the most, be secure in the knowledge that God is present.

Amen.