

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany – February 4, 2018 – Communion
Church Annual Meeting
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister
Mark 1:29-39

FOR REFLECTION

"The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well."

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson, American writer (1803-1882)

We are still here...

We lost two lights this week. Last Sunday morning I was texting with Julie Goudie. She was telling me to visit her once she was home – which would be soon.

“Please thank everyone for all the prayers. I’m still at Kaiser improving. Praying for rosemary and corine.” (6:58am)

I responded, “Will do... so glad you are on the mend. Love.” (8:05am)

“Xo” (8:08am)

Julie died as her beautiful, loving heart gave out at 10:08am.

And then Wednesday, our Rosemary Jewell – on hospice with her daughter Corinne beside her – breathed her last. Rosemary and her husband were deep pacifists and were drawn to Mt. Hollywood by Rev. Alan Hunter – WWII pacifist and advocate of any number of social justice issues.

Rosemary and Julie both loved to dance. And now they are both dancing with their Maker – the One who loves them – and us – with unimaginable joy.

And we are still here... as are their children and grandchildren... both grieving AND celebrating their lives. We pray for Julie and Rosemary – for true rest and healing, for joy and discovery beyond this life, for reunion with loved ones who have gone ahead. We send love and light for this next part of their journey – as they, perhaps, talk with one another – perhaps now in conversation with Jesus – asking him all those questions they had stored up over lifetimes of faith and hope. May their spirits lovingly watch over their children and grandchildren – strengthening them for their earthly purpose – until all are reunited in the presence of the One Who Made them. Amen.

And we are still here...like Shi-mon's mother-in-law – healed so swiftly of her fever by her son-in-law's friend, Yeshua – and overjoyed to be out of bed – doing what she felt she was meant to do.

That day being the Sabbath, it wasn't until sundown and Sabbath laws were lifted, that neighbors brought others to the house for healing. It was a long night. And in the dark early morning hours, Yeshua found some solitude – and time to restore himself in prayer. (If you ever wanted proof that Jesus was an introvert – there it is!) People were searching for him (some of them wishing to do him harm – others hoping to benefit from his healing powers) – and the disciples, knowing him best, found him. And Yeshua responds by stating his sense of purpose:

"Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; **for that is what I came out to do.**"

"...for that is what I came out to do..."

According to Mark, Jesus' purpose was proclamation of "the message" – and, at this point in the story, the target was "neighboring towns." Of course, "the message" is not defined here. There are centuries of interpretation of what that message might have been – not the least of which is Eugene Peterson's aptly titled The Message – the Greek Testament in modern language.

But, in our story, Jesus had a purpose – he knew what it was – even when others distracted him with all the things they WANTED him to do.

Every one of us has a purpose. Julie and Rosemary each had their purpose.

Those of us who are still here...each of us has a purpose.

And we, as a Church founded on Christian beliefs – as a Beloved Community – we collectively have a purpose.

And we – in a variety of ways – can say what that is:

"...for that is what I came out to do..."

Part of our purpose IS to proclaim a message – although the definition of the verb "to proclaim" is a bit different in our time and context.

In some churches, the minister takes the lead, proclaims (usually) "his" interpretation of the message and brings the congregation along with his vision.

In our UCC tradition, the congregation collaborates with the minister on interpretation and message. Together we embody the vision and live out our purpose.

In the UCC – especially THIS UCC – this often means drawing the circle wide around a variety of visions – being inclusive and supportive of each individual person's purpose – and celebrating our diversity. It may look like we are herding cats. It may feel like we are herding cats. But if we are bound together in love, a sense of unity does emerge and give us shape.

This is some of what I have come to know about of Mt Hollywood UCC
We are still here... We continue... We exist... together... for a purpose.
We are believers in G-d – and our descriptions of that G-d vary – though we tend to agree on our G-d's value system and general intentions for us and our planet.
We love each other and humankind and this planet. We are allies with one another and many who have gone before us – standing with G-d – embodied most markedly by Yeshua – on the side of those who are powerless, victimized, pushed to the margins.
We champion the poor – and peace – and labyrinth gardens – and the health of this earth with equal fervor. We do our best to reduce suffering and to teach and raise children who will share these values. It's one reason that, at least in this country, the younger generations are more generous and more inclusive than their parents and grandparents.

Like our friend Yeshua – we participate in acts which are healing – and acts which keep the demons of self-absorption and greed and violence at bay. We know they will never be fully conquered – that a number of repressed demons have come out in full force in the last two years – promoting bigotry and advocating the taking of lives based on race and religious differences. Our purpose is to change the hearts of those who can be reached – and drive the rest back into the swamps where they can dwell in silence and relative backwater peace. We can do this – with the help of our children and their children.

We understand that most of our work is done outside of this room.
This is our base camp where we restore ourselves – patch up broken spirits and bones – collect supplies for the journey – get a sense of direction – before setting out again to meet the challenges of proclamation.
And we proclaim “the message” as we understand it – in our work as artists – acting, writing, photographing, painting, creating in myriad ways.
We proclaim our values in our work as teachers – shaping the minds and imaginations and values of children and peers and elders, strangers and friends and relatives.
We proclaim the sacredness of this earth – learning as we go – to be “greener” and more sustainable and gentler with this home of ours.
We proclaim G-d's love for every living soul – past, present, future – sometimes with tough love that sets boundaries – sometimes with embracing love that supports another through grief or illness.

We are still here...

We continue to thrive – fueled by the legacy of our ancestors in faith who now include Julie and Rosemary, my mom and Hilary's grandfather, and so many before them –
We continue to thrive – sustained by our Maker –
and guided by our understanding of what Jesus/Yeshua taught and did.

Who could ask for more?

Thanks be to G-d.

Mark 1:29-39

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30 Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31 He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32 That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. 33 And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34 And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. 36 And Simon and his companions hunted for him. 37 When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." 38 He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; **for that is what I came out to do.**" 39 And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.