

**Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles**

**Mardi Gras Sunday – February 7, 2016**

**Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister**

**2 Peter 1:16-21**

**REFLECTION**

The Church says: *The body is a sin.*  
Science says: *The body is a machine.*  
Advertising says: *The body is a business.*  
The body says: *I am a fiesta!*

- Eduardo Galeano in Walking Words

**Rising in Our Hearts**

At the end of the first century, Christians were beginning to think Christ would not make his promised reappearance. Our text this morning was a testimony in response to those who would dismiss the second-coming as a false prophecy. The writer, posing as the Apostle Peter, claims to have seen and heard God's voice at the baptism of Jesus and then at the transfiguration moment on the mountain top. He admonishes the doubters:

19 So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. **You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.**

The morning star, aka Venus, is a metaphor for Christ returning in glory.

At the end of John's Revelation – written around the same time as Second Peter - he claims that Christ said these words:

**See, I am coming soon...** I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end... It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony to the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, **the bright morning star.**

(Rev. 22:12-16)

These texts may have been written to keep Christians from falling back into pagan practices – or to keep them from losing all hope and debauching their lives – or to help counter-cultural communities of Christ maintain their stand against unholy empires. And 2,000 years later these may still be helpful testimonies that guide believers toward keeping the Faith – and, for the literalists among us, keep alive the hope that Christ will literally stand among us once again in the next few years to judge and separate and take the faithful home.

But for those of us who are metaphoricalists – the message stands today as a lamp shining in a dark place. The message tells us what Jesus told us about the Kin-dom of God, the Beloved Community – IT IS ALREADY HERE. Christ has already come again – and again and again and again. Christ comes again every time we live as if the Kin-dom of God has arrived. Christ is alive in every act of compassion – whether we are the givers or the recipients. Christ shows up wherever two or three are gathered in his name. Christ is here every morning when “the day dawns and the morning star rises in [our] hearts.”

And Christ is very much alive when we raise our glasses, eat together, laugh at ourselves and our crazy world, and dance at God’s fiesta. Jesus was very much a party animal, viewed by outsiders as a drunkard and a glutton, seen by his followers as a great story-teller, a man with charisma and a great sense of humor, an ice-breaker and community-builder, very much a resident of the present. We tend to focus so heavily on his serious, suffering side – forgetting the joy and irreverence of his life and personality.

Jesus was Jewish for heaven’s sake. He was steeped in Jewish humor and irony. One of the reasons I quote rabbis a lot is because their perspective helps me understand Jesus better. Here is Rabbi Lawrence Kushner’s take on Laughter and the celebration of Purim – which lifts up the story of Esther:

If by the word “sacred” we mean that we cannot laugh at it, then it is less than sacred. But conversely whatever occasions joyous laughter turns out to be sacred... Laughter is so important that Jews have institutionalized it into a holiday. Purim does more than celebrate the foiled attempts of anti-Semites everywhere, it makes us laugh at ourselves... Furthermore...we have made Purim, which celebrates the foiling of our enemies, into a time for laughter by dressing up like them... When the Purim play is over, all the actors get applause, but Haman, the villain, gets the most. Access to the most joyous part of ourselves comes through ritualized reminders that we are as bad as our enemies... Indeed, only our ability to laugh at ourselves keeps us sane and from becoming like them.

(THE BOOK OF WORDS pp.63-64)

Now here is an interesting factoid. Did you know that Hitler outlawed Purim? The end of the Purim story is the revenge of the Jews – the massacre of 75,000 Persians. Hitler’s claim was that if the Jews had waged war on Germany, there would have been a new Purim – Jews killing Germans. Seeing as Hitler was a literalist, I can see why he thought that. It is, after all, a story of revenge against those who have massacred

Jews. After WWII some survivors of the death camps celebrated Purim with effigies of Hitler in Haman's place. It was a ritualized way to deal with what he had done to them... a small but powerful healing practice.

And if we look at the Christian-sanctioned secular celebration of the Mardi-Gras (Fat Tuesday) Carnival – there are echoes of Purim. People wear masks and costumes, overturn social conventions, dance, file through the streets in parades dressed like parodies of the ruling class. Kings and queens and courtiers – Heads of State and Heads of Church are brought off their pedestals – the powerful are brought low – and the commoners celebrate a one-day (or week-long) revolution.

All things that Christians are ordered to relinquish for the penitential season of Lent – fatty, sugary foods – carnal pleasures – personal pride – bawdy laughter – these are indulged in outrageous quantities for a few days before the curtain of decorum is drawn. If Fat Tuesday – aka Shrove Tuesday – is a day of confession and preparation – then Carnival is a 4-dimensional Confessional - admission that we are ALL debauched sinners and we need to be saved as much as the worst of the worst.

But at the heart of this Ritual of Rebellion is the reassurance that there is sacredness in the Joy of Life. Irreverence is holy; the human condition is made bearable by humor. And God laughs hardest and longest at our frolicking.

Christ is here right now – king of kings decked out in spangles and beads. He serves the bread of life – albeit broken – and the cup of joy – albeit poured out in times of hardship. He invites us to invite God to the party, to thank God for a joke well told, to feel God rising in our hearts like the morning star.

I will leave you with a joke you may or may not have heard:

Two women stand talking in the market.

One says, “My son the doctor – I sent him to Israel to live on a Kibbutz – and he came back a Christian! I can't believe it!”

Another says, “What a coincidence! My son the lawyer – I sent him to Israel to travel – and he came back a Christian! Unbelievable!”

Both women look to the heavens and say, “Ha Shem! What are we to do?”

God says to them, “Funny you should ask. My son the rabbi – I sent HIM to Israel...”

## 2 Peter 1:16-21

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. <sup>17</sup>For he received honour and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’ <sup>18</sup>We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

19 So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. **You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.** <sup>20</sup>First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, <sup>21</sup>because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.