

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Eighteenth Sunday of Pentecost/Ordinary Time – September 18, 2016
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1

For Reflection

**“We are shaped by our thoughts; we become what we think.
When the mind is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves.”**

- Buddha, Founder of Buddhism (563 BC-483 BC)
"Buddha was an actual man, and his life story has been told by many. The facts vary from one retelling to the next, but the story of the founder of Buddhism is about the path to enlightenment, not about earthly specifics." – Brainy Quote

“Find a place inside where there's joy, and the joy will burn out the pain.”

- Joseph Campbell, American mythologist (1904-1987)

Presupposing Joy

Earlier this week I was looking for quotations about joy – and came across this one on a site called “Brainy Quote.”

“We are shaped by our thoughts; we become what we think. When the mind is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves.”

- Buddha, Founder of Buddhism (563 BC-483 BC)

The site attributed this quotation to Buddha and his biographical note said:

"Buddha was an actual man, and his life story has been told by many. The facts vary from one retelling to the next, but the story of the founder of Buddhism is about the path to enlightenment, not about earthly specifics." – Brainy Quote

For some reason this cracked me up. “Buddha was an actual man...” But actually – this is an important note for many people in this century who have grown up with blurred boundaries between what is truth and what is fiction. Peter asks repeatedly what it actually looks like when someone runs as fast as The Flash – presupposing that such speed is possible. I have to explain that The Flash is not an ACTUAL man: he is an actor playing a fictional character and special effects are used to simulate speed.

This also comes up when we talk about Jesus (and more recently in conversations about Santa). Peter understands that there is a genre called MYTH. But he struggles when it comes to separating the ACTUAL Jesus from the myths ABOUT Jesus – which may be the foundational struggle for all Christians in every age – at least those who are ACTUAL people.

Our text this morning was written by or for an ACTUAL man named Jeremiah. He lived toward the end of the 600's bce and the beginning of the 500's bce. He survived as his country rebelled against being a vassal of the Assyrian Empire (which crumbled for a multitude of reasons) and then was conquered and became part of the Babylonian Empire, then revolted several times against Babylon which resulted in the intelligentsia being taken into exile and the city of Jerusalem being leveled. Jeremiah did not go into exile but stayed to help with reconstruction – and where he had railed against the choices of the powerful, he proceeded to provide hope to other survivors of this crushing occupation.

Jeremiah's words:

18 My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick. 19 Hark, the cry of my poor people from far and wide in the land: "Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King not in her?"

Are the words of someone who has gone through horrific events – 9/11 times a thousand. He is a survivor of years and years of warfare in his own country. His plea:

22 Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?

His plea had to do with the wounds of war. "Balm" was not just comfort, it was the resin or gum of the balsam tree which was used to heal bodily wounds. These are words from a man who could easily have been suffering from PTSD – who could be compared to those living in refugee camps around the world in our own day and time – running from civil war and foreign occupations and drone strikes and missile strikes and suicide/homicide bombers and children armed with automatic rifles.

Jeremiah wasn't a fictional character and he didn't write poetry for literary journals. He was an actual human being – with a broken heart – expressing the pain of his people/his nation – and grieving their dead – and challenging G-d to make good on promises made over the course of centuries.

And he was begging G-d to return something that he had had at some point and had lost over the years of tragedy and trauma. He declares:

18 My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick.

Which means that at some point he had joy and a healthy heart. Even if it was something he only experienced in childhood – at some point he felt whole and joyful – and he longed to feel that way again.

And THAT – THAT is an actual human desire that continues in the human heart to this day. And I believe that desire to regain a deep sense of well-being and safety and joy is at the heart of our struggle as a nation – and our struggles as individual/actual beings.

Peter was about 4 years old, sick with a temperature and cuddled on my lap. He looked up at me and said, "Mama my happy is gone." It was heart-rending. But as he has grown from a very cheerful toddler into a moody 4th grader – I have realized that we all discover over time – some of us earlier and some later – that LIFE does not promise unending JOY. It is an intertwining experience of sorrow and ecstasy, pain and healing, brokenness and repair, loss and reunion, mistakes and wisdom. We find out the hard way that broken bones heal stronger than before, scars are our teachers, and cracks are where the light gets in (and, as my Dad says, "Where the water leaks out.").

Life is hard. Harder for some than others. But hard all the same.
And trying to protect ourselves from suffering does not guarantee our joy.
Electing a politician who promises a return to national pride and joy does not guarantee that return.
Survival does not guarantee a quality of life.

On the other hand, suffering does not necessarily eliminate the possibilities and opportunities for positive outcomes.
There are ways to find healing – even from PTSD – even from cancer – even from grief.

Remember that biographical note about Buddha?

"Buddha was an actual man, and his life story has been told by many. The facts vary from one retelling to the next, **but the story of the founder of Buddhism is about the path to enlightenment, not about earthly specifics.**" – Brainy Quote

Any life story about an ACTUAL person is about the PATH, not the SPECIFICS. It's about what we DO with and RESPOND to the specific events of our lives that determine how whole or joyful we are.

If we presuppose joy as our natural state of being, we are in for huge disappointments. But if we set joy as a resting place along the way – we will find it again and again – if we keep our eyes and hearts open to the possibility.

Because we are ACTUAL rather than FICTIONAL, we can count on having many times in life when "our happy is gone."

But the seed of joy is right here –
planted in our broken hearts by the One who made us.
And those cracks are where the light – and the water – gets in –
and where the roots expand into deeper soil –
and feel free to take that metaphor wherever you like.

I believe C.S. Lewis may have nailed it when he wrote:

"Joy is the serious business of Heaven."

May it be our earthly business as well.

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1

18 My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick. 19 Hark, the cry of my poor people from far and wide in the land: "Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King not in her?" ("Why have they provoked me to anger with their images, with their foreign idols?") 20 "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." 21 For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me. 22 Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?

9:1 O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night for the slain of my poor people!

September 25 * 11:00 a.m.
WORSHIP IN GRIFFITH PARK WITH OTHER UCC CHURCHES
Crystal Springs Picnic Area in Griffith Park
WE WILL CARPOOL!!!

About 100 UCC'ers will be participating in Worship in the Park. "Worship in the Park" combines a great worship service with UCC'ers from many churches and a super-size "church picnic." This year it will be held on Sunday, September 25 at **11 am in the "Crystal Springs Picnic Area" of Griffith Park.** We'll have a one-hour worship service followed by a BBQ and picnic. We also have a "Kids' Church School" for younger kids. Depending on the number of kids, we may need some parents to volunteer to help.

Dress, of course, is very casual and grass-stain resistant! Bring sunblock, folding chairs or a blanket to sit on and some food to share for a big picnic.

Each Church will be coordinating bringing its own picnic food to share. Those not coming as part of a church group, please bring hot dogs, hamburgers or veggie burgers for you and/or your family. There will be plenty of other picnic food to share.

Make your offering check payable to YOUR HOME CHURCH and use your own church's offering envelopes if you have them.

Directions are available from Anne. There is ample parking, but carpooling is always encouraged! It's not only good environmental stewardship, but it also makes the day even more fun!

Sunday, September 25 at 11 am – U.C.C. Worship & Picnic Griffith Park, Crystal Springs picnic areas “B & C”

A. From West Los Angeles, West Hollywood and Hollywood:

Take Los Feliz Blvd. east and go *past Vermont and past Griffith Park Blvd* almost to the 5 freeway. There is a major intersection with a traffic light at Crystal Springs Dr (to the Left) and Riverside Dr. (to the right). There is a huge water fountain on the right hand corner. Turn LEFT at that intersection onto Crystal Springs Dr.

Look for signs on white foam core board with directional arrows that say: U C C Worship

Proceed about 1.2 miles on Crystal Springs Dr. At the sign for “CRYSTAL SPRINGS PICNIC AREA and Pote Field” turn RIGHT*. Continue past the “Park Ranger Division-Administrative Office Building, # 4730 ½” around the ball field to the end of the road.

At the sign “CRYSTAL SPRINGS PICNIC GROUNDS,” make a hairpin LEFT TURN. (A building with the Restrooms will be to your right).

*[NOTE: If you miss the turn off, continue forward about 1/10 mile. At the STOP SIGN turn Right. Go to the end of the road and turn LEFT and go around the ball field.]

Follow the Parking Directions Below.

B. From the 210 – 134 Freeways - Glendale and Altadena:

Take the 210 West to the 134 WEST to the 5 SOUTH (the 5 South splits off the 134 just past Glendale).

EXIT OFF THE 5 SOUTH AT LOS FELIZ BLVD. Almost immediately TAKE THE FIRST RIGHT TURN ONTO *CRYSTAL SPRINGS DRIVE*.

Look for signs on white foam core board with directional arrows that say: U C C Worship

Proceed about 1.2 miles on Crystal Springs Dr. At the sign for “CRYSTAL SPRINGS PICNIC AREA and Pote Field” turn RIGHT*. Continue past the “Park Ranger Division-Administrative Office Building, # 4730 ½” around the ball field to the end of the road.

At the sign “CRYSTAL SPRINGS PICNIC GROUNDS,” make a hairpin LEFT TURN. (A building with the Restrooms will be to your right).

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Follow the Parking Directions Below.

C. From the 101 Freeway – Woodland Hills (S.F. Valley):

Take the 101 East to the 134 East to the 5 SOUTH.

EXIT OFF THE 5 SOUTH AT LOS FELIZ BLVD. Almost immediately TAKE THE FIRST RIGHT TURN ONTO CRYSTAL SPRINGS DRIVE.

*Look for signs on white foam core board with directional arrows that say: **U C C Worship***
Proceed about 1.2 miles on Crystal Springs Dr. At the sign for “CRYSTAL SPRINGS PICNIC AREA and Pote Field” turn RIGHT*. Continue past the “Park Ranger Division-Administrative Office Building, # 4730 ½” around the ball field to the end of the road.

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Follow the Parking Directions Below.

D. From Central, South & East LA

Take the 10 (East or West) or the 110 North to the 5 North.

EXIT OFF THE 5 NORTH AT LOS FELIZ BLVD. Turn Left on Los Feliz. TAKE THE FIRST RIGHT TURN ONTO CRYSTAL SPRINGS DRIVE.

*Look for signs on white foam core board with directional arrows that say: **U C C Worship***
Proceed about 1.2 miles on Crystal Springs Dr. At the sign for “CRYSTAL SPRINGS PICNIC AREA and Pote Field” turn RIGHT*. Continue past the “Park Ranger Division-Administrative Office Building, # 4730 ½” around the ball field to the end of the road.

At the sign “CRYSTAL SPRINGS PICNIC GROUNDS,” make a hairpin LEFT TURN. (A building with the Restrooms will be to your right).

*[NOTE: If you miss the turn off, continue forward about 1/10 mile. At the STOP SIGN turn Right. Go to the end of the road and turn LEFT and go around the ball field.]

Follow the Parking Directions Below.

Parking:

Our picnic areas, (B & C) have 15 picnic tables and are right across the grass from any of these 3 parking lots:

- 1) just past the bathroom pavilion there is a parking lot (to your left). Walk straight across the grass.
- 2) if that lot is full, the road turns to the right and there is another parking lot. Walk straight across the grass.
- 3) if that lot is full, the road turns to the right again and there is another parking lot back towards the freeway.

Go slightly to your right and walk across the grass.

Any parking lot works.

These directions are overly detailed and guaranteed to get you there!!!

If you get lost, call Laurie's cell @ [213-725-9208](tel:213-725-9208)