

Sunday, October 27, 2013
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon - Let Your Light Shine.

Our readings today speak of hope and promise, of faith and assurance, of things of old and of things to come.

Our service today, is a beautiful blend of traditional with some new twists – new voices – renewed energy.

This is our church – a historic Christian faith going back thousands of years, a Congregational model of faith that is just over 500 years old, an individual church that was gathered 279 years ago and a denomination, the United Church of Christ, that is just past 50 years old.

We are a living testament to the idea that God is ever present in our lives, and that we have the ability to make our faith our own, in this time and place.

This morning, I want to speak to our young people – but not exclusively – I want to speak to the youth in all of us –

the person who is looking ahead to what is next,

the person who has dreams of a future,

the person who knows that the world will change, but that there are some things and some people on whom we can always depend.

This past Monday night the moon was extraordinary.

I hope that you had a chance to see it.

It was full and bright and took up an unusual amount of the sky.

As Joe and I drove down Undermountain Road we kept catching glimpses of it through the trees.

We drove to the top of our hill and were mesmerized by the majesty of this moon seeming to sit right in front of us.

It made me realize why our ancestors worshipped the moon and why they believed it had magic powers.

Part of me felt sad that scientists and astronomers have figured out what the moon is and why it glows and why it's so big in October – only because I think the facts somehow distract people from the beauty.

The same thing happens with God. People get so bogged down in the how and why of God that they miss out on the wonder and awe of this God who loves us.

The next morning, on my walk, the full moon sat white in the sky opposite the rising sun.

I started thinking about the certainty of that moon going down and that sun coming up and of the enormous amount of uncertainty that occurs in between.

I began reflecting on the service that we would hold today and how we could honor those certainties in our faith – the presence of God, the peace that Jesus brings, the power of the Holy Spirit, the warmth of community, while embracing the thoughts and ideals of those who embody the future of our church.

I thought about the readings that you had identified for today's service in our conversations: Psalm 23, Ezekiel's dry bones and Jesus' bushel basket and I realized that the seeds of faith, the divine spark of belief is in you.

These choices, along with the hymns that you know so well, speak to me of a future church – a church that is clear and direct about mission and purpose, a church that can embrace the mission to love God and neighbor with our whole heart, soul and mind.

We are living in a time of dry bones...seemingly arid deserts lacking compassion, kindness, recognition of neighbor, love.

As a people, we long for green pastures and still waters.

And this is where, I think, it gets exciting.

Scripture promises us that we will not languish in the valley of dry bones – God will come and restore our souls.

Evil will not prevail – goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives.

I love the reading from Ezekiel – it is so vivid and so promising.

God promises to put His spirit within us, to give us life and breath and opportunity.

With God, there is always hope for a new beginning.

I would like to mark that new beginning for our church today.

You, Eleanor, Ellie, Izzi, Matt, Orrin, Katya, Olivia, Theresa, Lyndell – you are the future of this church.

It is to you that we will look to bring life to these dry bones, water to this parched land, light to those in darkness.

Your light shines brightly today.

Embrace that light – don't hide it under a bushel basket.

Come into this community of faith and share your stories – your ideas – your questions.

Help this church become a place where people find comfort in a troubled world.

Lead this church into a place that shines its bright light on injustice and works to address the problems of our world.

If I had one wish for you as you embark on your life in the church – it would be for humility.

Humility and compassion.

I believe that these two virtues combined have the power to transform our world.

I believe that these are two Christian virtues that you have in abundance.

I came upon this poem written by John van de Laar called

Healing Humility:

“So many voices trumpet their greatness,
so many images boast of their beauty,
flaunt their power,
squander their wealth;
and all too many of them do so in your name, Jesus.
And here we are in a world which is daily broken
by the foolish arrogance
of men and women just like us;
And so we pray for the healing of humility
to flood every corner of our world:
wherever there is exploitation
and God-imaged people are dehumanised;
wherever there is neglect
and the needs of the poorest are ignored;
wherever there is disdain,
and the sacred value of creatures and earth are denied;
wherever there is violence,
and the gifts of difference and dignity are rejected.
Wherever people are tempted to think of themselves
as better than others,
more worthy, more deserving, more important to you,
may your humility break in and challenge us,

reminding us of our brokenness and need,
and teaching us to serve and to love everyone
with the grace and humility you show toward us.”

This is my prayer for you this day.

That you will go out into the world with your light burning brightly for peace and justice,
knowing however, that there is always a place of green pastures and still waters to which you
may return.

Let this be the place that you come to restore your soul.

I hope that you will embrace the teachings of the Christian faith, particularly those that speak of
compassion and love.

I pray that when you encounter valleys of dry bones in your life that you will feel secure in the
knowledge that God’s spirit is within you and that new breath, new light, new life are yours.

And most importantly, I pray that you will feel cherished and nourished in this covenant
community – knowing that each person here today has pledged to you their support and their
love.

My prayer is that this will be a place where your light will shine brightly for many years to come.

Welcome and may God bless you and keep you and make his face to shine upon you.