

First Congregational Church of Montague Trinitarian
October 18, 2015
Rev. Barbara E Turner Delisle
Job 38:1-7, Hebrews 5:1-10, Mark 10:35-45
The Gift of Liberation

When I was reading Job this week I was reminded of a phrase I used to use... God is good... All the time... All the time... God is good. This is a great phrase to have tucked in the recesses of your mind. I think we've used it before but lets try it today again. I'll say, God is good... you say... all the time... I'll say...all the time... you say God is good. So anytime during the service today... or any day... when I or someone else says "God is good".... You say, "All the time"... I say, "All the time"... "God is good."

This is what Jesus is saying to James and John as well... don't worry about your place in heaven... God is good All the time.... Be here now.... Be with one another, be with me... that is where heaven is at... to know one another, to love and accept each other for who you are... just like God accepts and loves us... that is the true freedom... that is liberating grace. I was reminded of some of the ways God is good in our lives here at this church when I attended the MACUCC Super Saturday in Framingham yesterday. First of all ... I love what MA is doing in the sharing of resources. Our Super Saturdays are now being shared among three states... Yesterday we met with the people from RI. In the spring CT will join with MA and RI. It is wonderful to meet and share with our neighbors!

I attended two workshops and also worked with another delegate to share what we learned about responsible investing at Synod in a 30 table talk.

One of the workshops I attended was on Whole Church Evaluations and the other was on nominating committees... because I am on the nominating committee of the Franklin Association! I learned a lot from both. Both topics had three things in common. Both said having and knowing your mission statement was critical to successful church growth. I felt pretty good that we did all that work and came up with a mission statement. I did not feel good that I couldn't recite it but no one else could recite theirs either!

Both reminded us that each person sitting in the pews, each member of the church is a minister.... We are all ministers of the church. We each are caregivers of the church and able to minister to one another with our many and varied gifts. We remember this now and then but can do better I think.

The third thing they held in common was that the church belongs to God. I often forget that as I am trying to do the work of the church. I get focused on my own self and on trying to do what is best for you and for the church and I forget to turn the work over to God. I forget that this is God's church and we are to always prayerfully consider what it is God is calling us to do in this time and this place.

There were a couple of things that were mentioned that helped turn my thoughts and imagination around...

As regards worship... many churches function as if the pastor is the performer, the congregation is the audience and God is the prompter... I certainly can relate to that, can you?

Another way to consider it, a way that puts us into right relationship is this... congregation is performer... you are the ones worshipping, calling on God, praising God, listening for God... the pastor is the prompter and God is the audience... God is the one drinking in the praise, drinking in your attention, enjoying how you come to be in relationship with God.

God as audience... waiting, expecting, listening, interacting, drinking in our worship our liturgy, our praise, our music, our words

Pastor prompts... helps us to remember or imagine what to say or do

Congregation performs the acts of worship.

God is good... All the time....

Our sabbatical time, scary though it may seem, will be the catalyst for us to come into deeper relationship with God and with one another. It will be an opportunity to listen to God and one another as we did in our visioning... remember the joy we had of being together in our small groups... how we loved getting to hear from one another, seeing one another... It was wonderful. It is how we get to know God. It provides us with the opportunity to practice discerning again what God is calling us to do in this time and place... Like walking a labyrinth it will take us further on our journey together twisting and turning, never quite knowing where God is leading us but trusting in the journey... trusting God's presence with us and enjoying the comfort of journeying together.

Another twist of thought that was presented during the whole church evaluation workshop was about how we show up for worship. There were two metaphors... bib and apron. Bib refers to when we show up solely to be fed and apron refers to serving. In reality both happen for most... we need to be fed in order to serve... but keeping the euphemism in mind can help us to remember our true purpose is to serve... Jesus said to James and John and the 10 other disciples gathered... whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life to liberate many.

We talked about the lifecycle of churches too. Churches have about an 80 year lifecycle from birth to death... but that doesn't mean they die completely... although some do shut their doors... An aware and alive church, like ours, knows how to read the signs and takes the time to reevaluate and reenergize and retool. In this way we go through the cycle and reimagine the church taking it from a stage of decline to a stage of increase. Our sabbatical time together will help us to do more of that work. It will nourish our souls through many spiritual experiences and opportunities, It will feed our need to know God and each other as we spend time away together. It will lift our spirits and give us strength for the journey ahead.

A good reminder from one of the presenters yesterday was that because the church is God's and not ours we don't have to worry about killing the church... hasn't happened.... Won't happen. It's God's church and will always be even if it appears in a form that we hardly recognize as church. We can trust in God for that... thank God!

I think I will close with that... but remember God is good... All the time... All the time... God is good!!

Amen? And Amen!