

A Lenten meditation delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Ash Wednesday, February 17, 2010, dedicated to Sherman Hill who is searching for home, to Stan Parron in grateful thanksgiving and as a blessing on his journey of life and faith, and always to the glory of God!

“An Exciting Faith Finds Home”

**Joel 2:1-2, 12-17;
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

**(Part I of VIII in the sermon series
“An Exciting Faith”)**

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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English mystery writer Dorothy Sayers has written, “To make the Easter story something that neither startles, shocks, terrifies, nor excites is to crucify the Son of God afresh.” (Quoted in *Bread and Wine*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, January 2006, p. xv). Certainly, such a fate for the resurrected Christ would have been inconceivable to the first disciples. They had experienced firsthand the miracles, the healings, the teachings, the prayerful presence and the clear gift of God’s loving touch and justice through him. They had experienced the heady excitement of his entry into Jerusalem, the traitorous cunning of Judas, the guilty recognition of their own cowardice, the terror of his

slow death, and finally the disarming wonder of an empty grave and the risen presence of their Lord on Easter. (Ibid)

To feel the startle, shock, terror and excitement of our faith, we must travel through the 46 days of Lent which stand before us. As we start today, remember that Lent literally means “springtime.” What a refreshing thought! We journey through these winter days already in the springtime of our faith! To observe springtime is to strike at the root of complacency which too often surrounds our faith and to embrace the fulness of excitement that springtime brings.

Often we associate Lent with penitence, fasting, almsgiving and prayer. It is a time of “giving things up” balanced with “giving to” those in need. The practices of giving up and giving to are worthy for us to follow and practice. However, Lent should be more an opportunity than a burden. Out of a wintertime of darkness we should emerge repentant and empowered people. We should step forward excited by the faith which surprises us and calls us to renewal and resurrection.

Thirteenth-century German mystic, Meister Eckhart, once wrote that the people who have the hardest time with Lent are “the good people.” Most of us are willing to admit we have a few shortcomings. We acknowledge that we have a thing or two we can give up, but to name and claim our need for renewal, for resurrection, for a savior who is risen from the grave . . . well, that seems a bit much, doesn't it? In other words, we give up chocolate for 46 days, but to take on excitement, newness of life or true joy seems extreme. Nevertheless, that is what we are called to do in the springtime of our journey to resurrection.

We truly have an exciting faith! Our lively faith is one in which we can find friendships in difficult times of our lives, create communities of justice and peace, admit our mistakes – small and large and know that God forgives us and grants us grace, embrace the fullness of love and light, find joy and gratitude in serving, give

selflessly to others and be delighted and delightful in taking joyful risks. We can do all of this and more in the springtime of faith – the Lenten journey to the resurrection celebration!

Years ago, when faced with an unreconciled relationship, a friend of mine met for several hours with her former beloved one and a priest. They had faced a painful and difficult separation – one that had caused tremendous pain to each of them and the community of which they were apart.

Having confessed their sins and having admitted the way in which their sins had injured one another, their families, and their community, the couple received the reconciling assurance of pardon from the priest, then broke bread, shared the cup and embraced one final time – healed, reconciled, and released from years of pain. As she left the grace-filled and healing moment of reconciliation, my friend said to her former partner, “I love being Christian. In Christ’s love, we always have the chance to heal and begin again.” With those words, she walked into a future free of pain from the past. She walked into the healing light of Jesus Christ, into a new beginning. She had found her home in Christ.

On this exciting springtime journey of faith, I pray that each one of us finds our home in Christ. We find our home in Christ when we realize we need home. Before that realization, we wander and we wonder. We seek with no purpose and pursue with no goal. But, when we acknowledge our need for home, our heart finds rest in God.

In the beautiful Lenten reflections *From Fear to Love*, by Henri J.M. Nouwen, Father Nouwen reflects on Luke’s parable of the prodigal son. He writes in *Heading for Home*:

The prodigal son’s return begins at the moment he realizes that he has lost everything but the most important thing. What finally allows him to return is his awareness of the one thing that remains.

I'm still the child of my father. I still belong to someone.

In our lives, too, there are moments when we realize that even if we have done everything to destroy ourselves, we have never lost our true identity as beloved daughters or sons. This identity is never taken away. And that moment of realization is a very, very important moment. (In that moment) may we always try for a shaky return! (P. 16)

May God grant you safe passage home to Christ in the springtime of your journey. No matter how shaky the return, remember you are loved by God. You are beloved as God's holy and blessed children.

In this, our exciting, faith, remember you are embraced by a love that will not let you go. Come home. Come home. May God bless and keep you as you find home. Amen.