

Any morning people here today—those who love the early hours of the day? I enjoy getting up early in the morning, just as the sun is about to rise, which occurred at 6:08 this morning. In the summer the sunrise comes earlier each day until this week when the sun reaches the summer solstice on June 21, the longest day of the year. The sun then begins to rise later each morning, shortening the day as we head through the summer and into fall. I know not everyone enjoys the morning hours, but I love to hear the birds begin to sing as they sense sunlight's approach. Light begins to trickle across the sky, and soon the sounds of nature begin to sing, greeting the morning with sounds of joy.

The Italian Catholic monk St. Francis of Assisi who lived in the 13th century expressed the joy of creation in his poem “The Canticle of Brother Sun.”

3. Praised be You, my Lord, with all your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day and through whom You give us light.
4. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.
5. Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the
stars,

in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

6. Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind
of weather
through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.
7. Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
which is very useful and humble and precious and
chaste.¹

St. Francis continues his celebration of Brother Fire, Sister Mother Earth, and ends with celebration of our Sister Bodily Death, from whom no living person can escape.

The last portion about death seems like an odd thing to celebrate along with the sun and moon and wind, and yet, death is an integral a part of life as any other part of creation. Life contains a mixture of joy and sorrow, woven together in a complex web of connectedness.

During the next several weeks we will explore the mixture of emotions contained in the book of Psalms, an ancient collection of poetry and song used in worship among God's people. Although we may not sing these words in the way they were

2

expressed in the temple thousands of years ago, the words continue to echo with hope in times of struggle.

Psalm 113 suggests we offer praise to God, from the rising of the sun in the morning to its setting in the evening. If you're a morning person, you get a head start in celebrating the day, but even you late risers are included since you have until the setting of the sun to offer your praise.

Psalm 113 begins a series of praise songs known as the "Egyptian Hallel" psalms, a collection of six psalms read at Passover to celebrate the escape of God's people from the Egyptian Pharaoh. The Hebrew word *hallel* means "praise God," as in the word *hallelujah*. It's very likely that Jesus and his disciples sang these psalms as part of their Passover meal, which we Christians remember as the Last Supper that Jesus ate with his friends.

What began with an evening of singing psalms in praise of God turned into an evening of suffering and agony as soldiers captured Jesus and the disciples ran away to hide in fear. But isn't that

often how joy and praise occur in our lives? We may begin in celebration, but soon subtle shifts begin to happen as we enter a time of struggle.

The Lebanese-American writer and poet Khalil Gibran captured this connection between praise and sorrow in his poem "On Joy and Sorrow."

Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.

And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears.

And how else can it be?

The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain...

When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy.

When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.

Some of you say, "Joy is greater than sorrow," and others say, "Nay, sorrow is the greater."

But I say unto you, they are inseparable.²

The writer of Psalm 113 seemed to sense this connection, for at the same time he offered praise,

3

he wrote of God's concern for the poor and oppressed.

God lifts the poor and needy
from dust and ashes,
⁸ and he lets them take part
in ruling his people.
⁹ When a wife has no children,
he blesses her with some,
and she is happy. (CEV)

In the midst of struggle, God reaches out to those in pain, striving to bring hope into their lives. Many times, that reaching out comes through you and me and our mission partners as we reach out to those in need, as was the case with Tom and Monica Liddle who serve on an island north of Australia, East, Timor through our Global Mission funds. They told about an evening they encountered Linda:

About 10 o'clock one night, Linda showed up at our door in need of medical care. She had cuts and bruises on the backs of her forearms, evidence of having to defend herself against people attacking her with something hard and sharp. She was in tears, speaking incoherently and upset. Monica treated the wounds, we gave her something to eat, and sat with

her for a few minutes before, all of a sudden, she got up and left.

A few weeks prior on a Sunday morning, Linda charged onto the church compound agitated about something.... [She was] hurling several large rocks through the windows of the house next to the clinic where three youth live.

This week, Linda appeared one day after the clinic was closed and wanted to consult with Monica. Our theory about Linda is that the main reason she comes to Clinic Immanuel is for compassionate human interaction. With that in mind, Monica did what she always does with her: asked about her symptoms, weighed her and listened with the stethoscope, took her blood pressure, and finally gave her some vitamins and Tylenol. Linda was more than satisfied. I had just cooked dinner so we offered her some food. We sat down with her as she ate and listened to her tell stories which were hard to understand.

Linda is one of a handful of wanderers... Homelessness is relatively rare here. Extended families living together is normal, so most everyone has a place to call home. Most wanderers have an

④

undiagnosed and untreated mental illness. Sadly, there are absolutely no services for them. But what is more tragic is how little sympathy most people have for them...

Dealing compassionately with people like Linda is complex, messy and often uncomfortable but it is an imperative part of Christian spirituality and ministry. After all, the most fundamental insight about humanity in the Bible is that people are made in the image of God. And sometimes the image of God is disfigured, mangled and brutalized; the most shocking example being Jesus' suffering on the cross.³

Joy and sorrow. Happiness and suffering. We may prefer one set of emotions and strive to avoid the other. But they are all part of our lives, woven together within us and in our community of faith. In the midst of the complexity of anything that comes our way, God remains present, from the rising of the sun to its setting, from dawn to dusk, and each moment in between. In all of those times, Praise God!

¹ St. Francis, "The Canticle of Brother Sun."

² www.katsandogz.com/onjoy.html

³ Tom Liddle, "Being a Worm," May 10, 2019, www.globalministries.org/being_a_worm