

“Necessary Resurrections”

Rev. David Gregory

March 6, 2022

Lent 1



Rebirth Blossoms II

Leah Michelle

Readings

“Lent”

Lynn Ungar from *Bread and Other Miracles*

What will you give up for this season,
to help life along
in its curious reversals?
As if we had a choice.
As if the world were not
constantly shedding us
like feathers off a duck’s back—
the ground is always
littered with our longings.

You can’t help but wonder
about all the heroes,
the lives and limbs sacrificed
in their compulsion toward the good.
All those who dropped themselves
upon the earth’s hard surface—
weren’t they caught in pure astonishment
in the breath before they shattered?

Forget sacrifice. Nothing
is tied so firmly that the wind
won’t tear it from us at last.
The question is how to remain faithful
to all the necessary resurrections.

Psalm 40:4-8

from the New Revised Standard Version

You have multiplied, O God,
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;
none can compare with them.
Were I to proclaim and tell of them,
they would be more than can be counted.
Sacrifice and offering you do not desire,
but you have given me an open ear.
Burnt offering and sin offering
you have not required.
Then I said, “Here I am;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me
I delight to do your will, O my God;
your desire is within my heart.”

This is a moment of opportunity. This week we have entered the Season of Lengthening, and rather than seeing it as an individual path of penance and self-denial, we're focused this year on our collective awakening. All around us, we are seeing the signs and signals, wild flowers on the lush green hillsides, and lengthening daylight as the sun rises a little higher in the sky each day. The earth is waking up. We are waking up.

COVID might be a continuing reality, but we are slowly emerging into a new way of being with it. This could be our Rip Van Winkle moment, awakening from a long sleep to find the world a different place. We've said it so many times before, but we aren't the same people we were two years ago. As Lynn Ungar calls us to a new kind of Lenten practice, we are coming to terms with life's "curious reversals," about which we have had little or no choice.

Two years ago this week—marking exactly half of the time that I have spent with you here at CCC—I was having coffee at Peets with Rob McClellan, my clergy colleague from Westminster Presbyterian, when I got the strangest text message from Joanne saying that I should come by the office because we were shutting down. I had only a vague notion of what that meant in the moment, no idea what it would come to mean for our world, and no concept of the enormity of sociological change that was to come. And now here we are, at this brand new moment of opportunity—a resurrection, if we can imagine it; a very necessary resurrection if we can embrace it; an awakening to a new way of life, a new way of being, with new priorities, new decisions to make, new experiences to pursue. For some of us it might be a return to the basics that we've always longed for. For others, it is the continued grieving of our losses. For all of us, we can honestly say that things will never be the same; we will never be the same. And I might add that our church will never be the same.

This is what brings us together today: a moment of opportunity, a threshold of a new beginning, a time to examine our "curious reversals" and to invite the "necessary resurrections" that life is asking us to consider. This is a moment of opportunity. For me, it's the beginning of my fifth year with you, the marking of my 65 years around the sun, the first Sunday of Lent, and for me and Tripp, the beginning of a week of vacation, so that we can just take it all in.

This is a moment of opportunity to think together, to reflect together, to dream together, and together to ask ourselves some hard questions, to discuss our feelings about the answers to those questions, and hopefully to clarify a path into our future. Your Governing Board and your minister have spent many months in prayerful discernment and consideration of these moments. In all honesty, we're really tired. Many of us feel over-extended. Speaking for myself, it has been a difficult journey at this stage of my life and ministry to have the practice of my vocation almost completely redefined. All of that to say that things can get a little raw at times. The work of ministry in the COVID era has not been for the faint of heart. In the words of Longfellow, "Life is real; life is earnest." So while Lent holds layers of meaning for each of us, and may call up difficult experiences of punishment and penance or a theology of sin and sacrifice, this time we are called to something else entirely.

"Forget sacrifice." These are the words—however blunt—of poet and minister Lynn Ungar when she asks us how we can remain faithful to all the "necessary resurrections" that come up for us as we navigate a life of "curious reversals." We live in a world of curious reversals, otherwise known as change. Change often produces anxiety, but it does not need to paralyze us. Let us consider how it might instead empower us. As a church we have a track record of rising to the challenge. Let's build on that track record. This is a moment of opportunity. Let's imagine a new world. Together.