

Meditation - "A Season of Stones"
Ash Wednesday, March 1, 2017
Scripture Readings - Luke 4:1-4, Luke 19:37-40 and 24:1-3
Blythe Denham Kieffer, D.Min.
Westminster Presbyterian Church
Springfield, Illinois

A reading from Luke 4:1-4

4 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." ⁴Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" The title of the meditation: "A Season of Stones"

A reading from Luke 19:37-40:

³⁷ As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸ saying,

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." ⁴⁰ He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out." Let us pray. Loving God, who bends down to lift infants, whose understanding is unsearchable and who renews the strength of those who wait, we thank you for this season of preparation and remembrance as we journey together toward Holy Week. Amen.

A reading from Luke 24:1-3:

24 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in, they did not find the body.^[a]

The title of the meditation: "A Season of Stones"

Let us pray: Loving God who bends down to lift infants, whose understanding is unsearchable and who renews the strength of those who wait, we thank you for this season of preparation and remembrance as we journey together toward Holy week. Amen

Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge is a children's book written by Mem Fox and one of Kieffers' favorite stories. I had the opportunity to share it with the children in Bridges last month as we remembered the names we were given and the gift of our older friends from Westminster, our Advocates. It is a story about a young boy who happens to have four names and who lives next to an old people's home, It is a story about the friends he makes there.

One of his favorite friends is a 96 year old woman (who also has four names) Nancy Alison Delacourt Cooper. Wilfrid overhears his parent's saying that Miss Nancy has lost her memory and so he sets out to learn what a "memory" is and how he can help Miss Nancy find hers.

When he asks his other friends at the home what a memory is, he discovers a memory is something warm, something from long ago, something that makes you cry, something that makes you laugh, and something that is as precious as gold.

So Wilfrid sets out to look for memories for Miss Nancy because she had lost hers. He looks for his shoe-box of shells he found long ago (last summer) and places them gently in a basket. He finds the puppet on strings that makes everyone laugh, the medal his father gave him that made him sad, his football (which is precious as gold) and a warm egg from under a hen.

Then Wilfred visits Miss Nancy and gives her each thing one at a time. “What a dear, strange child to bring me these wonderful things,” thought Miss Nancy and then she started to remember.

She put the shell to her ear and remembered going to the beach by tram long ago. She touched the medal and talked sadly of the big brother who had gone to war and never returned. The puppet reminded her of the time she showed a puppet to her sister and how she laughed with a mouth full of portage. She bounced the football and remembered the day she met Wilfrid and the secrets they shared. And the two of them smiled and smiled because Wilfrid helped Miss Nancy find her memory.

Besides each having four names, Wilfrid and Miss Nancy share a friendship and a humanity that binds them together.

Lent is a season of remembering our humanity, the names we have been given, and the things that bind us together. Lent is a season of reflecting on our relationship with our Creator, a tangible season of prayer, honesty and contemplation.

This Sunday Westminster children will join friends from Grace United Methodist Church, the mosque, and the synagogues at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum as a part of the Children of Abraham journey. In an act of solidarity we will honor our shared humanity by creating care packages for refugee children recently arriving in the USA. The children’s book *Stepping Stones; A Refugee Family’s Journey* by Margriet Ruurs will be read. The author chose the metaphor of stones do depict the journey. Stones have been a tangible symbol in our faith throughout time and this evening we are invited to contemplate Lent as “A Season of Stones.”

In the forty days Jesus spends in the wilderness preparing for his ministry, Jesus refuses to turn the stone into bread when he is tempted to abandon his humanity. He resists, not because he could not do it, but because he chose to accept the limitations that are a part of life and join us in our humanity by walking in our footsteps. *Lent is a time of embracing our humanity.*

During Jesus’ ministry, when the Scribes and Pharisees want to stone a woman caught breaking the law with a man, Jesus bends down and writes something in the sand, perhaps wondering where the man is, and by pausing Jesus allows for perspective through the gift of time and silence. When Jesus stands up he invites the one who is without sin to throw the first stone. Funny thing, isn’t it, how being in Christ’s presence calls one to authenticity and honesty. No stone was thrown that day and neither did Christ condemn the woman. Lent is a time of prayer, confession and forgiveness.

As Jesus’ ministry culminates with his entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday prior to the last supper, trial, crucifixion and resurrection, the crowds welcome him with praise and adoration.

When the Pharisees ask Jesus to order them to stop, Jesus replies “If these were silent, the stones would shout out.” Lent is a time of gratitude for a God who joins us in our humanity, a God who conquered death by dying on a cross, and a God whose love cannot be contained in a tomb.

On the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, when they went in, they did not find the body

Tonight as we begin our journey into lent, we will each receive a stone following the imposition of ashes and the Sacrament of Communion. Carry it with you throughout this season as a tangible reminder of your humanity, the names you have been given, and the love of Christ which forgives us and binds us together. Amen.