

Christmas Eve Meditation
Wednesday, December 24, 2014
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Let us pray. Holy and loving God, we thank you for being beyond our comprehension in your presence and nature...who not only cares about suffering but is willing to enter into suffering on our behalf. As we reflect together this Holy Night, may the words of my mouth and the meditations and thoughts of each of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

My father had a great sense of humor and over the years shared jokes he thought his daughter, the minister, would appreciate. With Pope Francis' recent Christmas message to the Vatican, I was reminded of one of the anecdotes my father shared a few years back.

Pope John Paul II arrives at heaven's gates.

St. Peter says, *Welcome, you've done a lot of wonderful things while you were leading God's people on earth but quite frankly, God has a few things to discuss with you.*

The Pope says, *Why? Did I do something wrong?*

St. Peter replies, *God is not happy with your stance on women.*

The Pope says, *He's mad about that.*

To which St. Peter responds, *She's furious!*

We laugh not because we think God is a woman, but because we are reminded that God is neither a man nor a woman. God is larger than life and beyond our comprehension. God cannot be contained within our minds or houses of worship. God is like none other.

We laugh because as Mark Twain once said, "Humor is the soft edge of truth" and this simple interaction reminds us of the truth that when we become too confident in naming God and knowing God, we also become too confident in naming, categorizing and labeling God's people.

Tonight we celebrate the mystery and wonder of the Christian faith, that the God who is beyond our understanding, the God who created the ends of the earth would join us in our humanity in the Christ child, born of a woman.

Tonight, we walk with Mary and Joseph through the hills and the valleys of their journey to Bethlehem long ago and we affirm the God who entered into the cold and lonely places of our humanity by the backdoor of a manger. And what is more, the God who joined us in our humanity, Emmanuel, God with us, also entered into the joys and sorrows of this life and walked the hills and valleys of the VIA DOLOROSA ... conquered death by dying on a cross. In his book Love and Death, Forrest Church writes:

When I was young, I thought death took courage. I was wrong. It is love that requires courage, because the people we love most may die before we do. Dare to love and we instantly become vulnerable."

We do not and cannot possess the ones we love... This hard truth makes the courage to love the courage to lose. It speaks most eloquently when our expectations for the way life ought to be are interrupted and challenged by death, loss and disappointment.

My friends, if we risk in being human, in loving, in serving, in celebrating life; we will become intimately familiar with the places where joy and sorrow meet.

Part of what gives us the *courage to be*, the courage to embrace our own humanity and the humanity of one another is our faith in the God who created this world and each one of us from the depths of the earth. The God who is beyond our understanding, who provided a way for Mary and Joseph is the God who is present with us in the heights and the depths, in the hills and the valleys of our journeys. God's everlasting arms will uphold us in the places of our life where joy and sorrow meet. We have a God who has the courage to love, the courage to lose and who will hold us and nourish us when we love and lose.

I would like to close with a reading from John Phillip Newell's book A New Harmony,

In one of her visions of Jesus, Julian of Norwich realizes that Jesus is handsome, and the "handsome mixture" that she notes in him is "partly sorrow" and "partly joy." His face speaks of a knowledge of life's delight and a knowledge of life's pain. It is not a face that is naïve to the world's sufferings or to the personal experience of sorrow. Nor is it a face that is so overwhelmed by sorrow that it loses its openness and wonder. To be truly handsome, to be truly beautiful, is to reflect in one's countenance both life's glory and life's pain. It is not simply a sweet face, a pretty smile. It is a soul that has experienced the heights and the depths of human life.

By the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, through the hills and the valleys of our lives, may we reflect the countenance, the beauty, the handsome mixture of one who has journeyed to the place where joy and sorrow meet...and there seen the face of the One whose birth we commemorate this Holy, silent night; and the God who is beyond our understanding. Amen.