

How the Light Gets In

Pastor Cathy Fransson

Sunday May 31, 2015

Today I've chosen many of my favorite things: words and songs I love. Thank you, all of you in the choir, for singing us into a fullness of spirit. Music and poetry have held my life together since I was a child. Music, poetry, and prayer.

Cindy read, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God." Yet for the noise of the marketplace, phones, media, cascades of images in store windows and billboards, we can hardly see or hear it. God embraces the world as a parent embraces a child, so that we, with our limitations, can go on, picking ourselves up, dusting ourselves off, starting all over again.

You and I ache with powerlessness to change all that needs changing. The poverty and anger in our streets, wars run amok. The world beckoned to me when I started college, but those promises fell apart in the Sixties with assassinations. I railed at those in power. But I am a person of privilege now, and I cannot get all *my* ducks in a row. I cannot do all that needs doing. We are inadequate to bring the peace the world needs. But if we can see our limits clearly, we begin to know ourselves, love and forgive ourselves, and then forgive others. God is the light that lets us see that path. God is not embracing some other, more perfect world, or waiting for us to figure things out. God embraces this broken world, right here.

Like the psalmist, some days we feel as empty as broken pots, lost and alone with shattered dreams. But God's light shines through us, cracks and all. I know you as a people who gather together to protect, learn from, and support one another. You listen, share, and stand with each other. You have volunteered to lead; our worship demonstrates this community wealth. This is a place where welcome, recognition, and shouldering the burdens of the community thrive in spite of the disorder of the streets and our own trembling yearning to be our whole selves.

Ancient peoples knew they were imperfect. The Navajo wove it into every rug: the flaw that allowed the Spirit to move in and out of each piece. Ancient Japanese thought holds a similar concept: *Wabi-Sabi*. The things we create and the people we are are impermanent, imperfect, and incomplete. These broken pots are not perfect. Yet they shimmer through their fault lines.

Franciscan Richard Rohr writes that it is inevitable that we will all meet at least one situation that feels like a dead end. A wall we cannot climb, go around, explain, change, or even understand, whether illness, or accident, loss of a job or relationship. Yet when we meet that dead end, we begin to discover who we are. It happened to me. Every now and then, it happens again. When what I think is my wisdom is bewildered or blocked by circumstance, pain, and *always* by the deaths of loved ones, I lose hope. I rarely achieve what I hoped I would. And I know I am not growing into mastery, but the necessity of letting go. We must accept our imperfect selves and, like Elijah, hand our mantle onto others.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that *God said, "Light up the darkness!" and our lives filled up with light....all bright and beautiful. But if you just look at us, you might well miss the brightness, because we carry that light around in the plain clay pots of our ordinary lives.* We're broken pots mended with love. That shimmering imperfect light is our wholeness, the human distinctions that draw us to one another.

This broken pot I treasure with Robert Frost's poem etched around it, was created on Orcas Island. I was horrified when it fell to the floor and broke into pieces. I swept it all up, saved every fragment, and spent hours gluing it back together, piece upon piece, waiting for each shard to firm up enough to fit the next one on. This pot taught me that brokenness does not render us useless, but more useful, because we admit to, and show our limits. Faith assumes both the inevitability of pain and the promise of healing within the pain.¹ We need each other to find the strength to go on.

¹ *The Spirituality of Imperfection*. Kurtz & Ketchum, Bantam. 1992

I went to seminary to find answers to unanswerable questions, not to enter ministry. When I confessed—to Pastor Diane Hooge—I might consider it (a completely unconscious slip of the tongue) she listened. Her listening opened a door; I dared walk through. At my ordination Rod Romney said: *In true Baptist tradition then, we are each called into ministry. Deep within everyone...is a call....Just as it is the nature of a river to flow, it is the nature of a human being to search.* In this community we search together.

Romney had never heard me pray out loud, but he asked me to offer prayers in worship. When I had just one year of seminary behind me, he hired me. Two years later, Seattle University hired me. Walt Pulliam taught me Baptist history. David and I discovered we both loved the pastor who baptized me as a child (he's worked with him). So I seemed to be returning to a home here much like the one I had left in my youth. When the Northwest Region of American Baptists would not ordain me because I was gay, you did. And when Rod retired, you affirmed my ministry and following that, gathered a pastoral team with David, Steve, Craig and me, affirming our call together.

Miracles happened. I made friends in unlikely places, many of whom have gone on ahead of us. While on the Executive Committee of the new Evergreen Region, I went with Betty Bates to a ballgame at the Safe, and was chaplain at the American Baptist Women's annual weekend at Moses Lake. With Dorothy Pinard at the piano I sang and preached every month among a group of very old seniors at Bessie Burton Sullivan Nursing Home. I drank coffee and ate chocolate chip cookies in watercolorist Jackie Brooks kitchen and shared lunch in Doris Chase's apartment at Horizon House. She always said to me, "I'm so glad you're here!" I tried to keep up with almost six seminarians, two who serve here today. Gretchen Gundrum said *yes* when I invited her to join me in leading our new women's retreat thirteen years ago. The Interfaith Amigos came here with Rodney (after his retirement) for the church's first weekend retreat with Jews and Muslims, and I shared leading their interfaith retreats with Rabbi Ted, Jamal Rahman, and Don Mackenzie. Tim accepted the invitation of Gretchen Gundrum and me to lead a Lenten retreat at Rainbow Lodge. And look what happened to him!

I felt inadequate to accept most of these invitations. But I said yes, and then I studied, prayed, and learned as I went. When things fell apart, failing seemed better than never venturing out. Ardene, thank you for being there when things went well, and when they collapsed. For all the hours you kept my spirits up, helping with retreats, entertaining, and putting up with me.

My favorite prophet Elijah came to the end of his rope, too: *He came to a broom tree, sat under it and prayed to die.* Then God showed up (who was there all along....) and asked, “*What are you doing here, Elijah?*” I just love all these ancient stories where God walks around talking with the people. It’s so simple, and seems easier than our trying to discern how God speaks with us. God asks Elijah to take one more risk: to step out on a ledge, and then there is a raging tempest, a shattering wind, an earthquake, and a consuming fire—and finally—Elijah heard a whispering voice asking, *What are you doing here, Elijah?*

As human as we are, Elijah was stuck in dread; he heard his creator in the quietest possible moment. God is still speaking, just as Adam and Eve realized when they tried to hide: *Where are you?* God calls. What are you doing here?

Lift your eyes! The one who keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. My friends, look for God in all the places you think God has forsaken, for God is at work. Where helpers rush into the rubble of Nepal and the tumbled ice and rock of Mt. Everest, into the rain and flood in Texas, in tent cities, the makeshift camps at freeway exits, among the Rohingya people floating in the Andaman Sea and in sweltering refugee camps in Malaysia, friends move among the stunned and wounded offering love and care. Oh, yes, God shines through brilliant pink-orange sunrises and purple sunsets, too. God shines through the eyes of infants and the dying. God shines in the silence, in the clouds of war, and in the darkness. God shines in your mirror when you look to see where you have gone. God is the Light that cannot be put out. The love that will not let us go.

Shining through the cracks in the fragile, wounded pottery we are, God reveals our true selves. In spite of what humankind does to this fragile world, the One who cannot be explained or quantified is forgiving, loving, and urging us into new risks. That won’t stop happening to me after today, nor will it stop happening to you. I trust my story with you, and the very gifted leaders here—to Tim, Ned and David; to Sue, to Vicky and Michelle, to all who help lead us in worship.

Finally, never neglect sitting in the silence to know its subtle voice. Don't be afraid to do "nothing." To hear in the silence the word that will entice you away from doing. Absorb God's nurture. Breathe in the breath of life, so that you may breathe yourself into the world. Breathe in Spirit and strength, so you may breathe out love and work. Trust yourself to walk in the dark. Learn to "hold, to love, to suffer the conflicts of love, and not to judge, project or pass them on. Our immediate and direct contact with each moment is the clearest path to God's presence. If we allow the Light to enter[,]"² it is everywhere.

Thank you for welcoming Ardene and me into this community. Thank you for listening to my story, one you let me tell over and over again. Your asking helped me understand enough of it to have something to say. Ask for the stories of others, and listen to them, because in the midst of the broken world, unspeakable beauty, grace and mystery abide. Together, let us continue to...

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.
That's how the light gets in.

God bless you, every one. 6/1/15 9:21 PM

² Richard Rohr. *The Naked Now*. 2009