

Wesley United Methodist Church

November 3, 2019

“Otherwise.”

Deuteronomy 30:15-20, Romans 5:1-5

Poets and preachers are said to have but two subjects. God and death. Everything else is just footnotes. To remember every day that we must die is not morbidity but is being most aware of life. Jane Kenyon battled with leukemia to which she succumbed just before her 48th birthday. She wrote this poem after her husband was diagnosed with cancer.

Otherwise

**I got out of bed on two strong legs.
It might have been otherwise.
I ate cereal, sweet milk, ripe, flawless peach.
It might have been otherwise.
I took the dog uphill to the birch wood.
All morning I did the work I love.
At noon I lay down with my mate.
It might have been otherwise.
We ate dinner together at a table with silver candlesticks.
It might have been otherwise.
I slept in a bed in a room with painting on the walls,
And planned another day just like this day.
But one day, I know, it will be otherwise.**

We live each day knowing that reality will someday be “otherwise.” This knowledge can make the ordinary routines of life; eating, working, and walking in the woods an experience like eating, working, and walking with God. Deuteronomy tells us that God has set before us each day life and death, good and evil. In a flash faster than light, we can be confronted with the lessons of life and death, faith and hope. God gives us the choice to love him, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands in order for us to live the life that God has promised.

Today is the day when we call to mind the saints that live in our hearts and have gone before us. It is also a day when we remember the whole company of saints in heaven and on earth. All of God’s people who await the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so today, we give thanks for the life and witness of all the faithful departed.

The Apostle Paul teaches that suffering is the first step in the journey to hope. Then there is Jesus who connects human suffering with faith and spiritual power with healing. We as followers of Christ are an affectional and determined people. We know that life can surprise us. And when it does, our faith needs to retune us to the choices that are set before us. The choices of despair or hope. The choices of loss or gain. The choices of suffering or endurance. We also know that for the faithful, suffering is not something that is absent from us, but something that changes us and transforms us. We may have little control over how it changes us physically, but we have great control over how it transforms us spiritually. Paul said, “Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.”

Faithfulness is a way of accepting the suffering that life inflicts upon us, a way of appropriating the experiences and using them to grow in faith and hope.

Many of you are here this morning because you have been confronted with life and death. The death of a loved one. A parent, a child, a brother or sister, an uncle, or aunt, a cousin or a good friend. We know the pain of loss. We also know that illness, accident, affliction or death cannot take from us our hope, for we hope in things unseen, not things seen. We have the hope of seeing our loved-ones again. We have hope not because of our faithfulness, or even our strength or courage, but because God has promised to pour a Spirit of Hope into our hearts. A hope of sharing in the glory and victory with Jesus over all the darkness and disease that may come upon us on that day when “it will be otherwise.”