

Reflection and Prayertime - 4/6/2020

Thank you for joining me today in a time of reflection and prayer. I know that we come from varied religious or faith backgrounds and perhaps no background but we are all joined together in this shared time together. This week we find ourselves bracing as we are inundated with the news that the next few weeks may be brutal. It's good to brace and it's good to breathe deeply and hard to do both at the same time but I think this is what will serve us well this week and in the coming weeks and will help us if we can. We can do this hard thing.

This week is a very important week to those who practice the Jewish and the Christian faiths. Passover begins on Wednesday and continues into the next week and we know the Seder meals may look very different this year in a time of social distancing. If you are unfamiliar with Passover, it was the time in history when the Israelites were in the bondage of slavery to the Egyptians and the tenth of ten horrible plagues visited upon the Egyptians. It involved the Israelites applying the lamb's blood upon their doorposts so that the death of the firstborn plague would pass over the Israelites and only affect the Egyptians. It was to bring freedom to the Israelites who were treated cruelly in slavery. It seems surreal that we are in the midst of a disease so widespread and so dangerous as to be described as a pandemic and we are all, Jewish or not, collectively hoping and/or praying that it does not take our loved ones – we are hoping to avoid infection, to endure if we become sick, and to be “passed over” by this disease. We pray earnestly for a sparing from harmful effects of this infection even as we are partners with God and each other, curtailing our activity and minimizing our risk, doing what we can.

In the Christian faith, this is Holy Week. Yesterday was Palm Sunday when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and was greeted by people throwing their coats on the ground in celebration and honor but it's short-lived. Thursday we will walk through Maundy Thursday when some churches would normally be washing the feet of its members to follow Jesus' example of washing the feet of the disciples. Friday we observe Good Friday wherein Jesus has been tried and is crucified on the cross, and words are truly inadequate to describe here in a short reflection the significance of that for Christians. When Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem (and we wonder about how much he knew of what was to come or didn't – whether he anticipated his trial, his torture, and his crucifixion) - we can say that

when he set his face toward Jerusalem, he set it with determination to endure. Determination like I've seen on the faces of nurses and doctors and first responders this week. Determination I've seen on your faces. Determination I've seen on the faces of our clients to push through homelessness, addiction recovery, public health issues, social isolation, financial and other struggles.

Anthony Campolo preached in his Easter sermon "It's Friday, but Sunday's coming" and right now we feel so very stuck on Friday in this pandemic, but I want to remind you that even though we do not know exactly what Sunday will look like or how soon it will arrive, we know that God is on that side of these days and we know that hope springs eternal. Some of us believe in the resurrection of Jesus, that the crucifixion was not the end of the story but that Jesus overcame death and did rise again. Some of us believe in the power of the human spirit and have witnessed its overcoming unbelievable adversity. Some of us see resurrection all around us and some of us need to be reminded to hold tight to hope.

Weekend before last, a teenager at Unity House suffered a horrendous injury offsite at his grandmother's home. His injuries were so severe and his chances of recovery so minimal that I began to do some behind the scenes work without mentioning it to his mothers - I inquired with a bank about setting up an account to raise \$ for his funeral expenses. This past weekend when I thought we'd be having his funeral, he was weaning off a ventilator and opening his eyes. I had suspended hope and I need to remember that Friday's here, but Sunday's coming. How hard it is to not be consumed by what the poet Wendell Berry calls "forethought of grief" and how tempting it is to quickly suspend hope. These are trying days that lend themselves easily to despair but again, bracing and breathing will sustain us as we do this hard thing.

This has been a very difficult week with the passing of, to my knowledge, the first client passing away from health complications associated with Covid-19, a Supportive Services for Veteran Families client in one of the Southern Indiana counties we serve. We grieve for Dwayne's wife and grandchild, for his extended family and friends, for our SSVF staff who saw Dwayne experience success and growth in his life and celebrate it with him last year, and we grieve for him and his family for what might have been, yet we do not lose sight of the great value of

what was and is, and a huge debt of gratitude to our SSVF staff for helping him make positive change in his life.

Jessa Henry who manages our SSVF program and I happen to attend the same church and this past Sunday we along with some other church friends did the virtual special music, “Come Healing” by Leonard Cohen. I’m going to light a candle for Dwayne and his family as we grieve his passing and say a Prayer of Passing for him, then we will play Come Healing that collectively expresses our shared lament for healing and shares images of hope. The last photo in the slideshow is Heavenly Grace, who just made her arrival at our southeastern KY Freedom House last week and who reminds us that grace abounds.

And now as we enter into a time of prayer, I will mention some prayer requests and will say “O God,” and then you may join me if you’d like in saying “Hear our Prayer.” I share the following prayer requests:

- 1) For all of our staff and volunteers and clients, that they may not be harmed by this pandemic, by this disease
- 2) For the family and friends of Dwayne in our SSVF program who passed away, and for our SSVF staff who supported him.
- 3) For Tamara Reif’s family in the passing of her father-in-law Tom due to an accident this weekend, for her husband Ben and his brother as they can’t be supportive of family in person as much as they normally would.
- 4) For Steven Fuller’s friend’s father William Lewis in stage 4 renal failure.
- 5) For Jeff Gates friend in Binghamton NY who has been diagnosed with Covid-19
- 6) For Rebekah Barnett’s clients – one is a domestic violence survivor needing housing by May 1 and for a grandmother at Unity House who needs housing quickly.
- 7) For Devon, a teenager at Unity House in critical care unit after a horrible injury. For his moms, one of whom lost a sister to suicide 10 days ago. For this whole family consumed with grief and worry. What other prayer requests would you like to share today? Thank you so much for participating today and I encourage you to continue to brace but also breathe, to push forward in hope as we do this hard thing. Together. Remember it’s Friday, but Sunday’s coming.