

Becoming a House of Hope September 25, 2022, Jeremiah 32: 1-3a, 6-15 Luke 16: 19-31

*We are becoming the house of hope,
the field of sunflowers,
the vineyard of great caring.*

*Come to a shared commitment
to abundance possible for all people.*

*We are an earthenware jar,
to keep safe the tomorrow of children.
Our security question is – the word of God,
and our password is love.*

(Maren C. Tirabassi)

I was drawn to these words from the Reverend Maren Tirabassi because so many of us have become aware of the power of the image of sunflowers as we have looked with horror and also with awe at the war in Ukraine. Talk about becoming a house of hope! The Ukrainian people are teaching the world something old and something new about hope in what appears to be hopeless times.

My love of this call to worship also stems from the beauty all around us. The heavy laden sunflowers full enough to feed goldfinches and squirrels, deer and so many other creatures.

Then there was the phrase “shared commitment” and I thought of all the teamwork that is happening at church. And the image of people as

an earthenware jar, keeping safe the tomorrow of children. Finally I loved the clever riff on our computer age. “What is your security question – the word of God. What is your password? Love.”

When I heard the parable of the chasm between the rich man and Lazarus read aloud in our *Listening to the Gospel* group this week, I was touched by a reflection from a woman who spoke from personal experience of being part of a family that is being torn apart by political divisions. So torn apart that on some days it feels like a chasm is widening in her family. She told us that she fervently wants everyone in her family, her communities, in the world, and the planet itself to be well. Not just nourished and happy, although that too. She longs for the wellbeing of all. For God’s dream of goodness to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Her hope is placed in the earthenware jar of her full self.

Lazarus longed to be fed. The rich man longed for mercy. For what are you longing? Today, on this last Sunday in September when the harvest is abundant, our collective longing for the future is high. Can we take this time, in the quiet of the sanctuary, to sink into prayer and meditation for Lazarus, the rich man, Jesus and his disciples and a world bent on holding us in hopelessness? This meditation is a Buddhist one and it reminds me of the song we heard last week, *Dona Nobis Pace*. Grant us peace.

Close your eyes. Place your feet on the floor. Start with wishing well for yourself. Silently repeat these phrases slowly. *May I be happy. May I be healthy. May I be safe. May I live with ease.*

Call to mind someone you care about—a good friend. Someone who helped you in your life. Someone who inspires you. Visualize them. Say their name to yourself. Get a feeling for their presence, and then direct the phrases of loving-kindness to them. *May you be happy. May you be healthy. May you be safe. May you live with ease.*

Call to mind someone you know who is having a difficult time right now. They've experienced a loss, painful feeling, or a difficult situation. If somebody like that comes to mind, bring them here. Imagine them sitting in front of you. Say their name. Get a feeling for their presence and offer the phrases of loving-kindness to them. *May you be happy. May you be healthy. May you be safe. May you live with ease*

Think of someone who plays some neutral role in your life, some function that you don't know very well, that you don't have a particular feeling for, or against. Maybe the checkout person at the supermarket where you shop, the gas-station attendant, somebody that you see periodically. If someone like that comes to mind, imagine them sitting in front of you, and offer loving-kindness to them. *May you be happy. May you be healthy. May you be safe. May you live with ease.*

Finally bring to mind someone who you feel distant from, someone who is on the other side of an argument, or who has hurt you deeply. Or who you have hurt deeply. Offer lovingkindness to that person. *May you be happy. May you be healthy. May you be safe. May you live with ease.*

This practice open us to the possibility of including rather than excluding, connecting, rather than overlooking, and caring rather than being indifferent, both to ourselves and others. This aspiration can extend infinitely to all beings in a boundless way, leaving no one out. This aspiration can guide us from meditation into direct action. It can cross chasms and reach into the future.

No one and no place becomes and stays a house of hope without daily spiritual practice. This particular practice of offering ripples of lovingkindness may not be your practice. It might not be a spiritual practice for our church. But each of us and all of our houses of worship need practices to keep us open to change, to love, to real charity and to courage.

It will do no good to put your hopes in a jar, even the jar of your own dear self, if you do not take care of those hopes. If you do not take them and air them out. See what is fresh and what might have gotten a bit moldy and is no longer alive.

Ask yourself, is that practice, that joy, that way of being still working? Is it still contributing to the healing of the world? And if it is so, then keep that practice, that joy, that way of being, and keep the door open to the future.

“May you be as blessed as Jeremiah – with a word-of-God whisper when you are waiting, a glimpse of freedom when you are confined, a friend to show you the way forward, an earthenware jar of God’s love in which your signature is precious.” (Maren C. Tirabassi)