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**“Come As You Are”
A sermon by Marilyn Hedgpeth**

**Trinity Sunday (Year B)
May 27, 2018
Romans 8: 12-17, Isaiah 6: 1-8**

I seem to recall it happening the same year that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. died,
which would have been during my eighth grade year.

One minute, I am sound asleep in bed,
my hair coated with Dippity Do and wrapped around big pink curlers,
my face riddled with white dots of Clearasil;
and the next minute I am rudely awakened by a wiggley, giggley mound
of screaming teenage girls, piling on my bed, shaking me from deep sleep
to compel me to come with them to a “come as you are party”.

“Wait, what time is it?” I think I asked.

“6:00”, they reply on that dark winter morning; “Rise and shine”!

“But wait, I have to take out these rollers, comb my hair and wash my face,”
I probably followed.

“No time for that,” they reply. “You’re coming with us, *just as you are!*”

And with that, I drag myself from bed, still in micro-sleep, wondering
if this is a dream or a nightmare; throw on my winter coat, and pile
into the back of someone’s woody station wagon with all those wild giggly girls
to go and ambush another unsuspecting victim.

I have to say, though,

it was one of the most fun parties that I've ever attended.
It was a complete surprise, for which I was totally un-prepared, and therefore,
anxiety-free and worry-free.
Besides, someone else always looks worse than you do, first thing in the morning!

I mention this, because we don't know what Isaiah was doing when he got the
summons from God to "come as you are".
He, perhaps, was quite young, as the Biblical witness attests that he prophesied over
a span of 64 years, beginning the same year that King Uzziah died,
which scholars have determined to be around 740 BCE.
Perhaps Isaiah was a teenager who lived in Jerusalem;
the son of Amoz, given a name which means "Yahweh saves".
Perhaps he was sleeping soundly on a pallet in his parents' home,
when that train of God dragged across his face, and two wild seraphs
pounced on his bed, flapping their wings in time to their raucous chorus:
"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." (Isaiah 6: 3)

"Holy smoke," Isaiah probably said, coining that phrase for us,
as holy smoke filled his room, literally, while he rubbed the sleep from his eyes.
And the doorposts shook and the thresholds shook, as the wild things of God
roared their terrible roars, gnashed their terrible teeth,
and rolled their terrible eyes.
"Holy smoke," Isaiah probably said, "I'm in deep Dippity Do now,
for I am a man/child of unclean lips, living in a household of unclean lips,
and I think I have just seen the holiness of the Lord Almighty,
for which I will surely die."
Surely, I am not prepared for this, but who is?
Who is truly ready for the Lord Almighty to drag his robe across your face,
and for scary seraphs to touch you hotly on the lips to be God's mouthpiece,
God's witness, God's prophet?
What makes us ready when God awakens us to God's holy presence
and asks, "Whom shall I send? Who will step forward for the triune God?"

I thought about this passage last month, when Gray Wilson, an elder, gave a devotion

at the beginning of the Session meeting in April,
where he shared some amazingly deep reflections about the nature of God,
and the nature of Christianity in American culture, in light of the
fact that he and Amy are expecting their second child any day now.
I seem to remember him wondering about the kind of world in which they would be
raising their children, as our culture becomes more theologically diverse
and at the same time, more secular.
And I recall similar feelings when our children were young, Gray: experiencing both
a heightened awareness of being responsible for the next generation,
and the great weight of that responsibility;
of recalling Dietrich Bonhoeffer's statement that "the ultimate test of a moral society
is the kind of world that it leaves to its children";
and also of being more spiritually aware of God's presence in all of the above.
It was a time of great spiritual awakening for both my husband and myself,
as having children brought us to the realization of what it is like
to love someone more than ourselves;
and also the realization that someone also loves each of us as much as we
love our children, so we had better treat each other well,
as beloved children of God.

And now with the arrival of our grandchildren, yet another generation,
that same God-call comes rushing in again, with the cavorting seraphs
of the wild rumpus and their red hot coals that seems to say,
"Whom shall I send? Who will represent the triune God in claiming the faith
for them, in resisting evil for them, in teaching them to love and not fear,
in shaping the world for the better for them to inherit?"
I think it is the call that our public school teachers, nation-wide, are hearing
concerning the children they are charged with nurturing, feeding, protecting,
mentoring, teaching, shaping and molding. Whom shall I send?
It's no small task, friends! It is no small task!

One of my heroes of the faith had a postage stamp commissioned in his honor
this year, commemorating the 50th anniversary of his show,
Mr. Roger's Neighborhood.

Fred Rogers, Rev. Fred Rogers, an ordained Presbyterian minister,

was “a quiet but strong American *prophet*, with roots in progressive spirituality, who invited us to shape the world into a countercultural neighborhood of love – a place where there would be no wars, no racial discrimination, no hunger, no gender-based discrimination, no killing of animals for food, and no pillaging of the earth’s precious resources.”

(Long, Michael. *Peaceful Neighbor*, p. xiv)

Mr. Rogers (I have to call him that) believed in “a God who accepts us as we are and loves us without condition, who is present in each person and all of creation, and who desires a world marked by peace and wholeness.”

(Long, p.xv)

He “extended his peaceable invitation through numerous sermons, prayers, speeches, letters, books, and interviews, understanding all this countercultural work as part and parcel of his vocation as a Presbyterian minister – a minister called to embody and enact the unconditional and expansive love of God revealed in Jesus of Nazareth.

In fact, Mr. Rogers sought to ensure that his work of creating peacemakers was a faithful continuation of the ministry of Jesus – an ongoing effort to create the peaceful and just reign of God on earth.” (Long, p. xv)

One of my favorite stories about the prophetic Mr. Rogers was played out in a show which aired on May 9, 1969, a year and a month after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

It harkened back to an event five years earlier, when an interracial group staged a *wade-in* at a public beach marked “whites only” in St. Augustine, FL, formerly home to a famous slave market.

In that iconic episode, Mr. Rogers enters his television yard carrying a wading pool, in order to soak his feet in the cool water after a hot day spent outdoors.

When he spots Officer Clemmons, an African-American policeman patrolling the neighborhood, Rogers invites him to sit down and join him in chilling their feet together, and suggests they share the same towel.

“Okay, Clemmons replies, “This is going to be a beautiful day!”

And he takes off his shoes and socks and places his bare feet alongside Rogers’ feet in the cool pool water – in 1969!

And the camera focuses on the four feet soaking in the pool – a striking
image of pasty white and light black. (Long, p. 88)

Did Mr. Rogers do this on purpose, to trouble the waters of racial discrimination?

You bet he did!

Was it a bold move, both subtle and suggestive at a wild rumpus of a time
of roiling civil rights tension between segregationists and integrationists,
between advocates of violent change,
and advocates of non-violent civil disobedience?

You bet it was, and it could have had dire consequences for Rogers and his show.

Yet Mr. Rogers strongly believed that the claim of God upon his life was

to love as God loves, and to exhibit a counterculture of peaceful neighbors.

And he did that, over and over again by “affirming ALL others as good, valuable,
and loveable; by accepting ALL others just as they are and offering forgiveness
to anyone, whether or not they seek it.” (Long, p. 41)

What makes us ready when the God awakens and alerts us to God’s holy presence
and asks, “Whom shall I send? Who will step forward for the triune God
to love ALL as God loves, and thus incarnate ‘a provision demonstration
of what God intends for ALL of humanity’?”

(PC(USA), *Book of Order*, Great Ends of the Church, #6)

And how do we prepare, to receive that invitation?

I close with a poem of alertness and readiness and listening for the wholly other,

by Mary Oliver, entitled:

The Loon

Not quite four a.m., when the rapture of being alive
strikes me from sleep, and I rise
from the comfortable bed and go
to another room, where my books are lined up
in their neat and colorful rows. How

Magical they are! I choose one

and open it. Soon

I have wandered in over waves of the words

to the temple of thought.

And then I hear
outside, over the actual waves, the small,
perfect voice of the loon. He is also awake,
and with his heavy head uplifted he calls out
to the fading moon, to the pink flush
swelling in the east that, soon,
will become the long, reasonable day.

Inside the house
it is still dark, except for the pool of lamplight
in which I am sitting.

I do not close the book.
Neither, for a long while, do I read on.

In the holy name of the triune Lord Almighty, Caller, Challenger, and Comforter. Amen.

Because sermons are meant to be preached and are therefore prepared with the emphasis on verbal presentation (i.e., are written for the ear), the written accounts occasionally deviate from proper and generally accepted principles of grammar and punctuation. Most often, these deviations are not mistakes per se, but are indicative of an attempt to aid the listener in the delivery of the sermon.

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