

You Have To Sing The Blues To Feel The Joy

February 28, 2010

St. Paul's - Richmond United Church

Second Sunday in Lent

Philippians 3:17--4:1

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#)

Luke 13:31-35

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#)

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Lent is the time in the church year when we practice the spiritual gifts of letting go. They are the gifts particular to this season. The spiritual path we walk in Lent is the path of renunciation, the way of emptying, the way of subtraction. Yet the gifts that the discipline of Lent shows us should never be confused with austerity, impoverishment, or mere denial for the sake of self-mastery.

An orientation of self-emptying and renunciation is for the sake of the kingdom of God and its gifts. It's important to remember that the point of renunciation is not for its own sake, but in order to make room for something else.

One of the ways we achieve the self-emptying is through lament. Lament is weeping over the things that stand in our way of a new way of being. Lament is the moment of tears over the losses we have experienced. Lament is a time of feeling that things will never be the same again.

The season of Lent invites us to replace the habits of the world with the Disciplines of Christ. The point of Lenten spiritual practice is to remind us in a physical way of the kingdom of God. They jog our minds and memories so we can commit ourselves again to work for Christ's kingdom. Lamenting releases us for the present and the future we will build.

To live well does mean a letting go of those things that burden us. We need to take time of self emptying. Lament does that. It is like the blues. When one is so down and out all they can do is sing the blues. It is to let out cries too deep for words. The blues carry lament leading to joy, for in them, in the music, in the beat are means to feel the loss without being caught in the loss, burden by what is not and is no longer. There is a beat, a beat based on the beat of the heart and the beat sends us into self emptying. We let go of our attachment to the way things were.

The blues form which is ubiquitous in jazz, rhythm and blues and rock and roll is characterized by specific chord progressions — the twelve-bar blues chord progressions. The basic twelve-bar lyric framework of a blues composition is reflected by a standard harmonic progression of twelve bars in a 4/4 time. It is a dance beat while lamenting.

The blue notes allow for key moments of expression during the cadences, melodies, and embellishments of the blues. By the bass line it creates and reinforces the trancelike rhythm and call-and-response, and they form a repetitive effect called a "groove." To be in the "groove" is to be released from the things that hold us back. The blues are a call and response, calling us into new ways of being, to live well despite the pain.

Jesus laments, weeps over Jerusalem. How far it has fallen. It was to be a place of refuge and prayer. Luke presents two images: the fox and the hen. On the one hand there is Herod, that sly fox, and on the other, Jesus, wanting to cover Jerusalem as a hen covers its chicks. It is imagery that cannot be accidental. Luke knew exactly what images he was juxtaposing and why. In story form he presents two ways of being in the world: control and persuasion. And he leaves no doubt in his readers' minds about which one they should be emulating.

Blues sing of the oppression that seeks to control us. There is the repression of the domination system and lament calls to us weep so we can change our way of being. Jesus weeps to call us to joy, to know that the power of persuasion breaks the hold of the domination system. By lamenting we turn ourselves over to the power of love.

So we are called live love well and for the greater good - to be surrounded by love, to share love, to dance and laugh and sing the blues. We have to sing the blues to feel the joy that is around us-singing the blues, lamenting loss ends in Joy.

The first night of women's figure skating I think were struck by Joannie Rochette, the Canadian figure skater. The image we saw one who seemed so repressed, in face of her mother's death, so controlling and then she danced - in away sang the blues and then collapsed in tears. One way of reading her skating is that she danced lament.

In the church we need to lament so we can move on. Things will never be like they were. The past is gone and will never come back. Too often we say remember when, to a time when we thought we boomed. Lament helps us move on, to know that times have changed, that the idealized past is just that, a romantic image that never was. Lamenting gives us realism so we can move on. It calls us back to our mission.

It is to be a Christian community that can take a prophetic stance in social, cultural, economic, and political matters. None of us do that well but it will be the goal of the church. Lament helps to know where we have missed the point. We sing the blues so move on in Joy.

In the end we have a dual function - to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. Now, we always know that who those people is changed depending on the situation. The afflicted can afflict. The afflicting can be afflicted. In a community of love we should never beat up on people while calling them to their best selves.

Our role as John Cobb Jr. puts it is: "The church takes as its mission working with God for the salvation of the world ... assumes the world needs saving ... God cares about the world ... God is already working in and through the world through creatures and especially human beings toward the salvation of the world." As Marjorie Suchocki puts it: "God works with the world as it is to lure it to where ought to be." God is the supremely related one. A final note of the music we live: "God is in the world and the world is in God and God is more than the world."

Lament is the self emptying so we can connect with the harmony of God who continues to work for the salvation of the world. We join in, with confidence, for we are loved by God who trusts us.

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