

“A fresh wind in our sail”
CCUM - 3rd Sunday of Lent
8 March 2015

51 1_3 Generous in love—God, give grace!
Huge in mercy—wipe out my bad record.
Scrub away my guilt,
soak out my sins in your laundry.
I know how bad I’ve been;
my sins are staring me down.

4_6 You’re the One I’ve violated, and you’ve seen
it all, seen the full extent of my evil.
You have all the facts before you;
whatever you decide about me is fair.
I’ve been out of step with you for a long time,
in the wrong since before I was born.
What you’re after is truth from the inside out.
Enter me, then; conceive a new, true life.

Create in me a clean heart
7_15 Soak me in your laundry and I’ll come out clean,
scrub me and I’ll have a snow_white life.
Tune me in to foot_tapping songs,
set these once_broken bones to dancing.
Don’t look too close for blemishes,
give me a clean bill of health.
God, make a fresh start in me,
shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life.
Don’t throw me out with the trash,
or fail to breathe holiness in me.
Bring me back from gray exile,
put a fresh wind in my sails!
Give me a job teaching rebels your ways
so the lost can find their way home.
Commute my death sentence, God, my salvation God,
and I’ll sing anthems to your life_giving ways.
Unbutton my lips, dear God;
I’ll let loose with your praise.

This is one of my very favorite Psalms, especially with the inspired interpretation of Eugene Peterson in *The Message*.

Don't we all have times in our lives when we need a fresh start? Aren't there times when we want to be made new again? And this really is the task of Lent, to prepare us for the new possibilities of Easter.... of Springtime, of resurrection.

The Psalm writer is making a plea for redemption, in spite of errors in the past.

Here is one of the redemption and resurrection stories from Father Greg Boyle in his book, *Tattoos on the Heart*.

Scrappy walks into our office (apparently signing up to see me) and I'm not proud to admit it, my heart sinks. I haven't seen him in 10 years, since he's been incarcerated all that time, but even before that, I'm not sure if he's ever set foot in my office. My heart is in some lower register. Let's just say, Scrappy and I have never been on good terms. I first met him in 1984 when his probation officer assigned him here to do his community service hours. He was fifteen years old... with a chip on his shoulders the size of a Pontiac. "I don't have to listen to you." "I don't have to do what you say."

Some five years later, I was standing in a packed church, preaching at a funeral for one of Scrappy's homeboys. "If you love Cuko and want to honor his memory," I say to the congregation, "then you will work for peace and love your enemies." Immediately Scrappy stands up and.... his eternal scowl was fixed on me as he walked ... [out].

Three years later, I'm riding my bike patrolling the projects at night.

I enter Scrappy's barrio, and there is a commotion.... [and I find] Scrappy throwing down with one of his homies.... I stop the fight, and Scrappy reaches into the waist of his pants and pulls out a gun that he waves wildly. The crowd seemed to me more horrified than I am.... as they say, "Hey, put the gun down....don't disrespect G."

Scrappy steadies the gun right at me and grunts a half laugh, "Shit... I'll shoot him too." Are you getting a sense of what our relationship was like?

So, when I see him enter the office that day, it takes me a moment, *but I locate my heart....* "you wanna see him?"...."Course, send him in."

Scrappy is not large, but there is no fat on him. His hair is slicked back and his moustache is understated. He hugs me only because not to would be too awkward. We have, after all, know each other for twenty years. He wastes no time, "Look, let's just be honest with each other, and talk man to man. You know that I've never disrespected you."

I figure, why not, I'm gonna go for it. "Well, how 'bout the time you walked out on my homily at Cuko's funeral?... or the time you pulled a cuete out on me?"

Scrappy looks genuinely perplexed by what I've just said and cocks and scrunches his face like a confused beagle. "Yeah, well.... besides that." he says. Then we do something we never have in two decades of knowing each other. We laugh. But, really, truly laugh... head-resting-on-my-desk-laughter. We carry on until this runs its course, and then Scrappy *settles into the core of his being*, beyond

the bravado of his chingon status in his gang.

“I have spent the last twenty years building a reputation for myself....and now... I regret.... that I even have one.” he says. And then, in another first, he cries.... really, really cries. He is doubled over, and the rocking seems to soothe the release of this great ache. When the wailing stops and he comes up for air, he daubs his eyes and runs his sleeve across his nose. He finally makes eye contact.

“Now what do I do? I know how to sell drugs. I know how to gangbang. I know how to shank fools in prison. I don’t know how to change the oil in my car. I know how to drive, but I don’t know how to park. And I don’t know how to wash my clothes, except in the sink of a cell.”(pause)

I hire him that day, and he begins work the next morning on our graffiti crew.

Scrappy discovered, as Scripture has it, that “where he is standing... is holy ground.” He found the narrow gate that leads to life. God’s voice was not of restriction, to “shape up or ship out.” Scrappy found himself in the center of the vastness and right in the expansive heart of God. The sacred place toward which God had nudged Scrappy all his life is not to be arrived at, but discovered.... Scrappy did not knock on the door so God would notice him. No need for doors at all. Scrappy was already inside.

... God’s unwieldy love, which cannot be contained by our words, wants to accept all that we are and sees our humanity... Scrappy’s moment of truth was not in recognizing what a disappointment he’s been all these years. It came in realizing that God had been beholding him and smiling for all this time, unable to look anywhere else..... the best we can do is find the moments that rhyme with this expansive heart of God.....Behold the One who can’t take His eyes off you. Marinate in the vastness of that.

I've been out of step with you for a long time,

Enter me, then; conceive a new, true life.

Create in me a clean heart

Tune me in to foot_tapping songs,

set these once_broken bones to dancing.

God, make a fresh start in me,

shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life.

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Bring me back from gray exile,

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and I'll sing anthems to your life_giving ways.

Here at Christ Church, we need a resurrection, too....a new start. We have been through some challenging times over the last several years. We have sadly seen some people move on. Yet, we are still a powerful group doing many wonderful things to demonstrate God's love and care for all people. And in order to continue to thrive, we need to bring others in to join us....to share in this

We are asking that God open us to new possibilities. Shape a Genesis week... a Genesis year... in us. What we need is hearts open to change. Change is difficult. It's hard to accept new ways of doing things. What we have now feels comfortable. And sometimes it's hard to look at ourselves with new eyes. What do people see and feel when they enter here? What are people looking for in a church today? We certainly can't be everything to everyone. But what kinds of things can we do that reflect who we are AND create a radical new welcome to others. We need to continue to ask ourselves some hard questions as we stretch beyond the familiar.

As we continue our journey through Lent we have considered some of the

strengths that help us along the way. Looking back at our ancestors, we remember their courage and resiliency, their trust and hope, their determination and willingness to lean on God.

Very thankfully, we are not alone. We certainly need others. We need our faith and hope. We need courage and willingness to try new things. And we need to keep asking some hard questions, and being open to new answers, ideas that will open our doors wider. Change is scary and hard, but new possibilities and growth don't happen without our willingness to lean into the future.

Melissa Sevier has a message for us as she says -

We need a clean heart. Not just during Lent, but all the time. We need to put away old ways of thinking and acting that are no longer good or helpful. We need to have our hearts renewed with joy, peace, goodness. We need character restoration, soul rejuvenation, heart regalanization.

As plants spring into being from dry seeds, as winter comes to an end and spring explodes into visible life, as sunlight warms the earth into activity—even so is God able to engender new life in our souls.

May God re_create in us. © Melissa Bane Sevier, 2012

Scrappy had to go through some really tough life experiences to finally come to hopeful new realizations. Somehow, he woke up and become receptive to “the expansive, [welcoming and inviting] heart of God.”

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Tune me in to foot_tapping songs,

set these once_broken bones to dancing.

God, make a fresh start in me,

shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life.

Friends, what will put a fresh wind in our sails?