

bread for the journey

The Good News Fantasy

I live in the city these days. When one lives in the city, one does not get fooled easily.

The good mayor of this city would have you believe Chicago is the greatest city on the face of the earth. The lake front, the Drive, the Gold Coast, the world's almost tallest building. Unless you have spent too much time going in circles on the Navy Pier Ferris Wheel, you know better. There's trouble in River City. One image in particular sticks in my craw.

One lovely day this summer—I was walking down Sheridan Road in the Uptown neighborhood with a friend and fellow pastor. Summertime in the city. Ah, the sights, sounds and smells of a great city—sirens, screeching tires, rotting garbage, trash-strewn bus stops, and then this unforgettable image—hundreds—literally hundreds of people encircling a full city block, waiting in line to apply for free government supported Section 8 housing. Every one of these people represented a family that was either homeless or soon to be homeless. These folks were not happy—pushing, cursing, shoving—they were desperate for a home to go home to.

This is not the way it is supposed to be in the greatest city in the greatest country in the known world. But it is. It's a messy world that cries out for healing, for beauty and for some semblance of order. This downward-spiraling world calls for some major league HOPE ..., not hopium but good old fashioned Good News Hope.

Or, is the possibility of hope just another entertaining fantasy to distract us from catching a cold case of despair? A friend sent me a poem recently. It was a terrific metaphor for prayer. Picture someone throwing gravel at an upstairs window while trying to get the attention of the occupant inside. Just when you picture the stone-thrower giving up all hope, he sees the curtain move. Someone is home after all! So we keep praying.

Really? Seriously? Does God finally come around to move the

curtain? After all is said and done, does the good Lord come through? Does all this work we do for justice, equity, and lasting help for the marginalized, the poor, and the addicts who live among us matter? Our mantra/motto/hope and calling card at Rosecrance is “lasting recovery.” Treatment here offers our clients the hope and opportunity for lasting recovery. Really? Lasting recovery in a culture where nothing lasts forever?

I loved what the Reverend Katie Givens wrote in the November 13 issue of the *Christian Century*. It makes me believe again the Good News is not merely a fantasy concocted by cockamamie, cockeyed optimists and charlatans. “The paradox in God's lofty promise in Isaiah 65 (his vision of a new heaven and a new earth wherein the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard no more) is that all will be resolved, and that all is resolved. The good news is that this frees us; we are not prisoners of our circumstances. The world is and shall be bigger than all the limitations we encounter in ourselves in others and in the material universe of gravity, violence, aging, suffering and injustice.”

That is hefty stuff. It is more than the simple hope “the curtain moves” when we throw a stone of a prayer at it. This kind of hope takes more than wishful thinking. It takes a smidgen of faith and assurance of things not seen to believe this.

Living in this moment of hope is a constant chronic struggle. I suspect this is what makes community so important. I sat in church Sunday. The preacher was waxing eloquent, even weeping as she pleaded as if to knead faith into her congregants. Sitting in front of me, a young woman came in late, sat next to some friends, one of whom put her arm around her. She was weeping. A few moments later, her male companion joined her. No more weeping. What was the back story there? I don't know. But I do know this. This weeping woman will work out what she needs to work out partly because she has friends around her to give her the necessary encouragement to go forward.

I tell you AA works, treatment works, church works, family works, friends work for the common good because of the honesty

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and no-holds-barred intimacy of the fellowship. Even though it seems everything is all wrong, everything is all right because of the people who surround us with their love and acceptance.

I believe this is how God works the magic of healing in us. We need to remember while we are scrambling to undo a painfully stupid past or fretting to control an uncontrollable future there is a God at work bringing about more goodness and grace to the present moment than we can ever imagine.

Tell that to the dead silence in the Philippines after Typhoon Haiyan wiped out untold families. Tell that to a mother who inexplicably lost her son to a heroin overdose. Tell it to people for whom there is no answer to their "WHY?" We will do exactly

that. We will continue to speak the unspeakable good news fantasy. In our churches, families, and here as well—at Rosecrance.

We speak the unspeakable good news because it is the only reliable news there is to speak. Rosecrance offers the opportunity for lasting recovery. It is more than a good news fantasy because we are a community of faith-based people who will never give up on God, knowing God will never give up on us. We've seen God at work. So have you. 



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bread for the journey
is a bi-monthly news and views letter from Rev. Dr. William Lenters, Rosecrance Church Relations Coordinator. Bread for the Journey is written on behalf of people who live with substance use and mental health disorders. Together, and by God's grace, we will try to make a difference.

