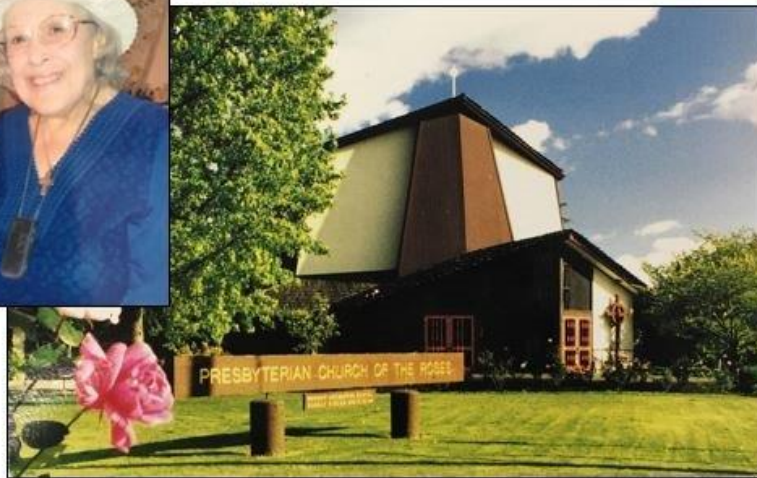


GOD IS STILL CALLING!



Scripture:

Psalm 145:8-14

⁸The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. ⁹The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

¹⁰All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your faithful shall bless you. ¹¹They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, ¹²to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. ¹³Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

The LORD is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds. ¹⁴The LORD upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

¹⁶“But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

¹⁷“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.”

¹⁸For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; ¹⁹the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

²⁵At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



GOD IS STILL CALLING!

The timing of this passage amazes me! The Holy Spirit must be involved in the choosing of these lectionary passages. I've been in touch with the Steele family for a few months trying to figure out the best date to have a Joy Steele day when we would commemorate our church's history and Joy's involvement from the very beginning. Last week when I discovered today was going to be her birthday, Jonathan and Nancy said it would be fine to choose today for her ninety-second birthday celebration here at church.

These lectionary passages today seem to fit a church celebration day perfectly. Both the Psalm 145 passage and the one from Matthew inspire us to contemplate and celebrate our church's history over the past many generations. And what a blessing it is to have a chance to also celebrate Joy who kept her faith strong over these past ninety-two years.

Yet the Matthew passage can be a bit confusing, too. Especially the verse 19 that says: “...wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

WISDOM LITERATURE

Rev. Dr. Alyce McKenzie who wrote a book about the Wisdom literature in the Bible comments on Matthew 11:16-19. She believes this passage describes two messengers of Wisdom, John and Jesus.

The mentioning of "This generation" in verse 16 refers to the authorities around Jesus who refused to believe he was the Messiah. And since John the Baptist, was a preacher of repentance, he also threatened the practices of those in power. He called out to them, “wailed at them,” the scripture says, but they would not repent and mourn, and he was put to death.

**Jesus was a preacher of grace
as well as repentance.
He healed on the Sabbath and ate
with sinners. He promoted
wholeness and joy and inclusion.**

Jesus played the flute for them, so to speak, showing them the way like a Pied Piper, but they would not dance. So he was put to death.

The deeds of Jesus showed the inbreaking presence of the kingdom of God. 'Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds' means that if people were comprehending the deeds Jesus accomplished they would have clearly seen he was the Messiah ushering in the kingdom of God.

WE CAN LAY DOWN OUR BURDENS

Sadly they were blind even when he invited them to lay their burdens down and rest in him.

To be told we can lay down our burdens sounds so sweet, until we realize that, in Jesus' eyes, many things we view as blessings may actually become burdens. These include judging others, thinking of oneself as superior to others, feeling entitled to live a comfortable material life, and making a habit of excluding and avoiding those who society views as unclean sinners, those on the bottom rung of the social ladder.

Even though divesting oneself from a luxurious life surrounded by many comforts feels like a great sacrifice, it is the less burdened life that leads to a life of forgiveness, refreshment, and companionship, which then empowers us to live with the humility, courage, and compassion that forms the essence of wisdom. All are connected through Jesus who eternally calls us to "Come all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls."

Then Jesus adds, "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Because Jesus is so inclusive, he makes learning his lessons easy (compared to many Rabbis of his day) and the burden he gives us is basically to love God and love your neighbor as yourself. It is as light and as heavy as that, not complicated but also not worldly.

THIS CHURCH AND THE CALL FROM JESUS

This church has been striving to live up to this call from Jesus ever since we were formed in 1953.

To love one another and share that love with this community and world has been God's call, and Church of the Roses continues to answer God's call. Your presence today shows we are still listening to God's call to be a community of faith together here on this little corner of the universe.

Montgomery Village needed a church back in the early fifties and the Presbytery of San Francisco (before the Presbytery of the Redwoods was formed) called out to the First Presbyterian Church on Pacific Avenue for help forming this church. So a group of our charter members, including Joy Steele, answered the call to form a new church. They were inspired by the call that came through a sermon preached by Reverend Bill Bowen.

In the beginning we were going to be called the "Montgomery Village Presbyterian Church" but Reverend Bowen changed the name to "Church of the Roses" and the congregation agreed.

We are eternally grateful for those brave souls who helped plant this church sixty-four years ago. Let's remember how we got our famous beginning and stop the history lesson at the point when our own Joy Steele burned the first mortgage paper after it was paid off.

(An historical video was shown to the congregation.)

May we continue onward for generation upon generation and leave the legacy of this church in productive shape for the benefit of

all who are touched by this church's many ministries.

When people say all churches are declining, tell them that this church has gained over fifty new members in the past three years. Thanks be to God and your welcoming hard working ways! God is still calling us to be a beacon of light and hope in Santa Rosa. Your Presence here is essential for listening to God's call and helping us form and shape this church into what God wants us to be for the future of Santa Rosa. God is still calling, and with your physical, spiritual, and financial support we will be able to answer God's call for many generations to come. Hallelujah!

Benediction:

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



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