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United Methodist Church

Oct. 31, 2010

**“Tomorrow’s Yesterday”** Rev. Valerie Oden

Scripture: *Matthew 5:*

Sometimes things aren’t as they seem. What we may think is real at one point turns out from a broader perspective to be different than we thought.

Like when we go to the grocery store for just 2 or three items and pick up a little hand held basket on the way in, and somehow find ourselves returning to our car pushing a buggy.

Or like the other day when I was going to the hospital and someone passed me on the right shoulder just as I was about to get into the right turn lane, and I must admit I thought, “How rude!” and then a few minutes later I saw him pull up to the ER door and a passenger got out quickly and ran up to the door.

Or perhaps like when we once had a vision of what our lives would be, and they don’t turn out that way, but if they had, then we would have missed the amazing gifts that we’ve encountered along what we thought was a detour. Things aren’t always as they seem.

But we can’t always recognize that today. It often takes looking back on yesterday from tomorrow to show us that things aren’t always as they seem. For then our perspective is broadened, our vision deepened.

Take this, for example, instructions to women getting married in the 50’s, purportedly from an old magazine:

*The Good Wife, Housekeeping Monthly, 1955.*

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- Have dinner ready. Plan ahead, even the night before, to have a delicious meal ready on time for his return. This is a way of letting him know that you have been thinking about him and are concerned about his needs. Most men are hungry when they get home and the prospect of a good meal is part of the warm welcome needed.
- Prepare yourself. Take 15 minutes to rest so you'll be refreshed when he arrives. Touch up your make-up, put a ribbon in your hair and be fresh-looking. He has just been with a lot of work-weary people.
- Be a little gay and a little more interesting for him. His boring day may need a lift and one of your duties is to provide it.
- Clear away the clutter. Make one last trip through the main part of the house just before your husband arrives. Run a dust cloth over the tables.
- Prepare the children. Take a few minutes to wash the children's hands and faces (if they are small), comb their hair, and, if necessary, change their clothes.
- Listen to him. You may have a dozen important things to tell him, but the moment of his arrival is not the time. Let him talk first - remember, his topics of conversation are more important than yours.
- Make him comfortable. Have him lean back in a comfortable chair or lie him down in the bedroom. Have a cool or warm drink ready for him.
- Arrange his pillow and offer to take off his shoes. Speak in a low, soothing and pleasant voice.
- Don't ask him questions about his actions or question his judgment or integrity. Remember, he is the master of the house and as such will always exercise his will with fairness and truthfulness. You have no right to question him.
- A good wife always knows her place.

It's only fair to acknowledge to you that this may or may not have been fabricated; [snopes.com](http://snopes.com), a website devoted to exploring the truth of urban legends, calls the status of this article "undetermined."

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We laugh at it partly because of its faint familiarity, partly because of its ridiculousness, partly, perhaps, in awkward response to our wondering if we are actually better off as a society today than we were then.

Regardless, we recognize in it the limited perspective that any decade's people have. But smugness is kept at bay when we realize that 50 years from now, some preacher will stand here and pull up an article from a 2010 magazine, or refer to a movie being made today, or, heaven forbid, pull out one of Rusty's or my sermons and use it to illustrate to the congregation that we were *so* limited in our view of things, today, which is tomorrow's yesterday.

And of course, that preacher would be right. For we are limited in our perspective. Which is why, I believe, the world's major spiritual traditions call us to ground ourselves in a perspective that fully includes everything we see – the good and the not so good—about ourselves, our culture, our lives today, *while* stretching our site toward what is beyond what anyone in any time can see. We call this ultimate perspective Faith.

Faith says that inside the realm of God—whether you call it the Kingdom of Heaven, Nirvana, Transcendence, the All, the Void, the Union, or Enlightenment—faith says that inside the realm of God, things may not be as they seem.

Like this, from our Christian tradition (Beatitudes)

The Beatitudes offer us a perspective that may seem to turn the world upside down. Inside out. *They show us that what we think is so important in this moment may not actually be what ultimately matters.* What is it that ultimately matters in our lives?

Which brings us to the saints who've gone before us. And the children who will come after us.

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Find someone this week who knows they are in the sunset of their lives and ask them this: Through your life, of everything that you've experienced, done, purchased, what is it that still matters, now? If you yourself are one such sunset-gifted person, ask yourself the same question. And since none of us knows if the sun will rise on our lives tomorrow, perhaps it's a question every one of us ought to ask. Throughout our lives thus far, what is it that still matters, now? If we are among those who live long lives, what will have mattered when we move into the sunset?

I expect the answers will be similar. Relationships. Love. Sharing of ourselves. Giving. Going to bed each night leaving the world just a little bit better than when we got up in the morning. Maybe even a life of days strung together where, with each sunset, we had grown even just a touch toward wholeness, and helped the world do that too.

We won't all phrase our answers the same way. But most of us gathered in this room will not assess the value of our lives by how important our jobs were or how much money we have in the bank at the end or the square footage of our homes. We stand on a different foundation. We are called to ground ourselves in what matters eternally.

Those who have gone before us have left us a legacy of their love, standing on this foundation of inside-out priority of value that looks beyond what it can see into faith's vision. From the time of Jesus, followers have been standing on a vision of a just world. Through history they courageously faced persecution to proclaim that things are not always as they seem. That there is a better way, one that includes all at the table, one that moves humanity along toward wholeness.

More recently, those who built this church stood on a vision of what might be. They took a risk and reached deep into their hearts' commitment and their financial means and gave generously to build this church, later keeping it vital through the decades. Why? Because they and we believe

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that this church offers something to the people who come here, to the community we serve, to the world, that matters ultimately.

Today we are here because of those who lived in the 50's and 60's as young adults. They had vision. And we live in their legacy. Some of them are here in this room now.

What shall we do with their legacy? Which leads us to the children of tomorrow.

Arvada UMC has a unique thread to bring to the tapestry of Christian churches. We do not match the media's portrayal of a typical Christian church. Have you noticed?

Not only do we offer a voice of progressive theology and social justice and outreach to match that is vital to today, but this unique voice will be essential to the future of the Christian church. The children we are raising today will be the voice of the church tomorrow.

We cannot know now what they will see as they vision the future for their children. But we can stand on our faithful vision, today, and make it real.

*You've received a brochure that describes some of what our church leadership—lay and clergy—has discerned as next in our Visioning Goals, based on the all church Visioning process of a year and a half ago. We have already extended the hours of Schawn Kellogg so that she can work more with our children's ministry. We have already found an amazing Youth Director who has been doing all sorts of new programming with our youth since she started 2 months ago. Both of these were steps taken in faithful response to the Visioning priorities. But they were taken in faith. We need your help continuing them in 2011.*

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*Many other visions have already become real with many others that we simply yearn to make real. And we can. How? By each household of our church giving up one Starbuck's latte each week and offering the 3.50 extra to the church. Coffee not your thing? How bout that other drink you enjoy? One per week. Or maybe it's one dinner in instead of out in a month, or every other month depending on where you go and how many of you there are. It might mean playing a game instead of renting a movie one night. Or hand washing the car instead of going through the auto wash next summer.*

There will come a day when those who come after us will both gasp and laugh at us, because of things we cannot now see. But they, like us, will find a sense of appreciation for what we left them. They, like us, will look thru the lens and see our vision. And they, like us, will be grateful for how we cared for what we have, used it wisely, shared it generously, and left them a vital church for them to build on, continuing to make better our community and our world, edifying lives along the way.

The time to consider what kind of world we shall leave as our legacy for them is now. The time to consider what kind of church we shall build for them is now. And if we do so grounded in the ultimate perspective that faith calls us to, with its vision that extends beyond what currently is, then when tomorrow's children look back on yesterday, they will see and appreciate, deeply, how we were good stewards of their future.

They will stop in a worship service on All Saints Day in 50 years and they will name names. Our names. They will remember where we sat in this room, and feel our presence. That is possible because wherever they are, they will be grounded perspective of faith, in the realm of God, which they are

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learning to live *now*. And in that perspective, what matters is turned inside out, and visions *can* become real.

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*A church where science, religion and life are compatible*