

Arvada
United Methodist Church

March 1, 2009 Dr. Seuss – The Cat in the Hat Is Back Rev. Rusty Butler Mark 1:9-15

This week we began Lent with the Ash Wednesday service. Valerie talked about repentance and reconciliation during the meditation. She talked about it in such a helpful way, about repentance also being about turning around, about a metanoia. A new beginning. And she talked about reconciliation and how it is about brokenness being made whole. I believe meditating on both of those can be very helpful for us as we move into our 40 days of Lent.

But here we are on the first Sunday in Lent and we are beginning a series called the Theology of Dr. Seuss. Now that is not something very many churches across the country would do during Lent. Lent usually is kind of a dreary season, a dark season even though the word Lent means Spring. The church color is purple instead of something more festive, like red or green or pink or yellow. We have white on the communion table because we are celebrating communion later. And Communion trumps Lent in this case evidently!

Of course, there is the whole thing with the ashes. One pastor wrote a note on his Facebook wall that on Friday he still had ashes under his fingernail. I looked and I did too! In some churches there is a shroud put over the cross, and sometimes a rough hewn cross is brought into the middle of the sanctuary. In some traditions it is usual to give something up during Lent, To fast was very important in the early church and through the middle ages. John Wesley was a firm believer in fasting.

Lent can be pretty heavy. But here we are with a meditation that uses a story by Theodore Seuss Geisel. Dr. Seuss. And well, let's admit it, he doesn't seem very heavy. I mean he's a children's story writer for crying out loud.

Now I can tell you this secret, Lent lasts forty days, to remind us of the forty days that Jesus spent in the desert being tempted and preparing himself for his ministry. And here's the secret...not very many people know this but each Sunday during Lent is not counted in the forty days of Lent. That's because they are supposed to be mini-Easter's, days of celebration and remembering that even during the rather heavy time of Lent are supposed to help you get through to the big Easter. The story ends on a good note. That's what the Sunday's are supposed to do for us.

Maybe, maybe Dr. Seuss can help us to do just that, end on a good note.

Would you pray with me?

O God, Our puzzlers are chronically sore,
but with the help of each other and the stories of faith,
we will journey, and search, and bring our best to this day. Amen.

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The Cat In the Hat is Back

Lynn, Jared and I were talking about the Cat in The Hat this week, the different characters, the Cat and the kids and the mother and the fish. Lynn suggested that the fish in the story was the symbol of good. She said, "The fish was trying to make sure everything was in control, making sure things didn't get out of hand!" My twenty two year old son and I both didn't really have any love for the fish who we both thought was a fun squarsher. Bringing everybody down, not letting anyone have any fun.

I wonder if it's that way in every family...that people have different views of these characters. I have a sneaking suspicion that it might be so.

During preschool last week, one of the teachers was leading her band of four year olds to the chapel to have their music lesson and she was telling them, "there are lots of people doing work here so we need to be as quiet as a falling snowflake." And all the little ones were waving their arms like a gentle snowflake...quiet, but at the back of the line this little boy, started waving his arms like mad and hollering out, "BLIZZARD!!"

To each his own!

Some people think that fish is the good character and some of us don't! Some people want everyone to be a gentle falling snowflake and some people well they are just a blizzard.

The Cat in the Hat? A blizzard. No doubt about it...he brought chaos and disarray into the house. But while he did that, he also brought creativity and imagination and adventure. On the one hand this and on the other hand....that.

It's a hard balance isn't it? Does creativity, imagination and adventure always bring chaos and disarray? And if so, oh why does it have to be that way???

The scripture this morning, gives me pause. Here is Jesus going out to hear John the Baptist. Gets the message, and goes in to get baptized. He comes out of the water and Jesus hears the voice You are my son, the beloved, and with you I am well pleased."

Well how can it get any better than that? Wouldn't you think things would just be great then? But no...No the next sentence is, the spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And then he was there for forty days, tempted by Satan, with the wild beasts. On the one hand, with you I am well pleased, on the other hand out with the wild beasts and tempted by Satan.

That is tough is it not? That is so real, so messy.

On the one hand you get some free publicity in the newspaper and on the other hand, they get some of the story wrong.

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On the one hand you get excited about what is going to happen for and in the church and on the other hand people are scared because something new is going to happen for and in the church.

On the one hand you are so happy for your son or daughter who are finishing high school and on the other hand you know that it is a step in their leaving home and going it on their own.

Lent is a time for reflecting, taking stock, looking at the way our lives are lived. And on the one hand we can look and see and feel where things are broken, and cracked and bent in our lives. And on the other hand, we can hope, and care, and be part of the repair in our life with the help of the God in whom we live and move and have our being.

At the end of the Cat in the Hat, after all the chaos that has ensued, all the disarray and the brokenness, with the pressure bearing down of mom coming home, the cat says, "Have no fear of this mess," and we saw him pick up all the things that were down. He picked up the cake and the rake and the gown. And he put them away, Then he said, That is that."

In real life, it may not be so easy to fix all things that are broken in our lives, to pick up all the things that are down. But here's what I believe...that the grace of God...the space that God provides to us...allows for the broken to be mended, the things that are down to be picked up. And that is that. Amen.