

Ecumenical Thanksgiving Eve Service
Good Samaritan UMC and Edina Morningside UCCC
Rev. Howard Bell
November 25, 2015
Sharing Thanks

The prophet Joel changed the perspective of the people of Israel with his prophecy in the text that I have just read. The prophet is speaking to the people of Israel in the midst of destruction and despair caused by a plague of locusts. Earlier in the book he also relates the current suffering of the people of Israel to the suffering connected to the end times. But in tonight's text, he changes the perspective of the people of Israel by prophesying the end of the suffering of Israel. In place of famine and plague, the nation will be rewarded with abundant rain, full granaries, and overflowing vats of wine and oil. He prophesizes that the earth will rejoice, that the animals will not fear and souls of the people will be nourished.

Who are the prophets of today? What messages do we need to hear? There is no question that we can look outside of ourselves and see reasons for despair: the racial tensions that lead to horrible violence currently at play in our own city; the existence of hunger and homelessness despite having all the resources needed to eliminate such injustices; and this list can go on and on.

However, we also can look outside ourselves and see people of faith committed to non-violence in the solving of our conflicts; people of faith working to dismantle racism that reigns within our country; people of faith willing to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and offer shelter to the homeless; and this list can go on and on.

So, it really is a matter of perspective. Please think, now, of a person in your life who has changed your perspective. Think of someone who lifted you from a time of depression, or a time of loss, or a time of uncertainty; or someone who offered you inspiration to deepen your faith journey; or who inspired you to be of service to others; or who inspired you to become more engaged in issues of justice.

I have been blessed to have many such people in my life who have supported me and inspired me. I share thanks tonight for each of them. I know I would not be the person I am today without their influence on my life.

I will share now a story of one of those people who taught me many lessons and one of the most important lessons she taught me was a healing technique about changing perspective. During the 20 years that I served as Executive Directors of Pathways, a Health Crisis Resource Center, I was privileged to know and work with Ingrid Dille. Ingrid is a cancer survivor and co-authored a program called Renewing Life for people living with cancer and their families.

The technique she taught was to imagine yourself looking out into the world with a camera lens. When you are feeling victimized by your illness, overwhelmed with anxiety, and

feeling despair about an uncertain future; imagine that you are looking through a narrow camera lens. What you are seeing may be very accurate and true. There are many challenging issues someone faces when dealing with a cancer journey.

However, you can also choose to widen your camera lens. By widening the lens, you continue to acknowledge the reality of what you had seen through the narrow lens, but now – with a wide lens – you also can see amazing healing possibilities. You can see the people who surround you with support. You can see the power of your mind to direct your body toward healing. You can see the power of your spirit to connect you more deeply to all that you truly value in this life and beyond. The amazing reality that Ingrid taught me is that you can choose which perspective applies in the present moment in your life.

Tonight I choose to look through the wider lens. I choose to hear the prophet Joel as he prophesies the end of the suffering that we see in today's world. I choose to praise God for the blessings of this Thanksgiving season. I choose to see the power of our faith to move all of us into a better future embraced in the unconditional love of our God. May it be so. Amen.