

# **From the Pulpit of Trinitarian Congregational Church...**

**Sunday, February 22, 2015**

**Preacher: Rev. Julie Olmsted**

**Scriptures:**

**Psalm 25: 1-10**

## **Sermon: Human Longing/Gracious Gift**

At the very core of the human soul, there is longing. When we go to God in prayer, if we can quiet ourselves enough, we can know this firsthand. There is no guessing about it. There is nothing academic about it. It is raw; it is real. But there are layers and layers of stuff on top of this longing. There is the real demand of time. There are responsibilities and commitments. There are people rushing, in and out, all around us, everywhere, including ourselves. Just stop and think about what your days are filled with. Where are your feet (that is, where do you go)? Where is your mind? What are you up to? At the top of our minds, it seems, we are always going places and reaching for something. Now is never good enough. The future is what we're interested in (when we're not longing for the past.) Here is never good enough. We're going places. We're accomplishing stuff. We're building, doing, striving, fighting the good fight. Often it is more correct to call ourselves human doings instead of human beings.

But there is this longing. Sometimes the longing is going in multiple directions. In the morning, we long for coffee or tea. During the course of a day, we long to be fed. I have a frequent longing to shop. Shopping is a great way to calm the longing, for a time. Sometimes people long to smoke, to drink, to eat sweets, to go for "a treat." Once I was driving and I was saying to God, "I need a break. I need a break, God." And God seemed to answer, What makes you think you haven't gotten a break already? But I was longing. Longing to get away from it all.

We long to escape. I heard a 12-step person say that his life was motivated by one thing: to get outta here. Whether he was in school, at church, in a meeting, with someone he loved or someone he didn't, when he looked inside himself, he saw that his driving urge in life was just to get out. That would certainly drive a person to drink. And it does, frequently. Get out of my body. Get out of my mind. Get out of this war-torn world. Get out of whatever situation we may find ourselves in (or more accurately, that we got ourselves into). We are longing, you and I. We are in "constant craving," as the old song by K.D. Lang is titled. When we slow down enough to notice this, it can seem unbearable. This is why so many of us stay busy all the time. We keep moving, we keep doing. We are asked how we are, we might say, "I'm so busy, so busy." This serves as a self-fulfilling prophesy (I try never to say it). I myself

have difficulty slowing down; when I sit I need a task. I need a focus. I need wine, something to keep me grounded. Meditation is the true wonder drug for this condition. For me, ironically, it is something to “do”, which is to consciously “do nothing.” It is easier for me than napping is, that’s for sure. (That will probably change someday.)

So, we go from one longing to the next. Money. Power. Beauty (vanity). Youth. Escape. Something warm, something cool. It’s never over. This longing is constant in the mind and hearts of humans. What is it all about?

The psalmist knows. The psalmist here in our scripture today knows that basically, all longing is about the desire to connect with God, our true source. See, all this longing and distracted seeking, it is misdirected and misunderstood. I think I want coffee; I want the peace of God. You think you want a vacation; you want God’s love to be real in your life. He or she thinks they want power or money or relief or popularity from this group or favor with that organization. Recognition, appreciation, accolades, winning... No, what we really want is to have the presence of God be real in our lives. That’s it. That’s our hearts’ true desire. Many psalms tell us of this longing:

Psalm 84:2: My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

Psalm 119:20: My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times.

Psalm 119:131: I open my mouth and pant, longing for your commands.

Isaiah 55:1: "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

So many places we see the stark, plain and clearly communicated desire for God.

Psalm 42:1-2 Like a deer pants for streams of water, my soul pants for you, Oh God. My soul thirsts for you, the living God. When shall I come and appear before my God?

So, how do we fulfill this longing? It is ever-present but it can be filled. Lent is about acknowledging the truth. Lent is about re-connecting with the longing and then not filling it with anything but God. Our longing is the connection. Let me share a poem with you:

Rumi-13th century poet and saint, the most widely read poet in America...from Persia (present day Iran)

One night a man was crying, Allah, Allah  
His lips grew sweet with the praising until a cynic said:

So, I have heard you calling out, but have you ever gotten any response?

The man had no answer to that.

He quit praying and fell into a confused sleep.

He dreamed he saw Khidr, the guide of souls,

In a thick green foliage.

Why did you stop praising?

Because I never heard anything back.

This longing you express is the return message.

The grief you cry out from draws you toward union

Your pure sadness that wants help is the secret cup.

Listen to the moan of dog for its master.

That whining is the connection.

There are love dogs no one knows the names of.

Give your life to be one of them.

Our longing is real. It is not to be overlooked or stuffed down with food, drink, substances, or activity. This recognition is our starting point. We long. Human beings are designed to long for the presence of God. We are made in God's image. We are an extension of God, a very real crown of creation. Why wouldn't we long for our Source, and the presence of that source to be made real in our lives? This is what spiritual practice is ALL ABOUT. This is the essence of our lives. And when we are without it, life is meaningless. It becomes about this endless search for the perfect palliative, the perfect sedative, the perfect way to escape. I had a teacher that used this analogy: most people are eating the menu instead of the meal and wondering why they are not satisfied. We want the real meal, and we won't really be satisfied until we get it. Lent is about getting the real meal and not settling for the menu instead. Lent is about going headlong into the wilderness of longing. Lent is about discovering our innermost desire and letting that just be there, instead of "filling it up" with this or that worldly thing.

Once we allow this longing to be, something wondrous occurs. God steps in where God belongs: square in the middle of human awareness. Ah! God is real! You might be tempted to say. When the mind is at peace and looks on creation with this love that only God can provide, there seems to be nothing else we really need. "All I need is the air that I breathe and to love you," goes the song by Foreigner. It's such a beautiful state of mind. And you see that our prayers and our longing and our needful state were really about something: the desire to connect with ALL THAT MATTERS, REALLY. It is such a gift, a gracious and always available gift, if we are willing to accept it by releasing our desire for that which is not of God.

So, the invitation is to acknowledge this longing and just let it be, at least these next

few weeks. You won't have to wait long, but you might be uncomfortable while waiting. Are we willing to wait for this gracious gift that can only be received when we go to God with our whole selves? It's a good inquiry to be in just about now. Just ask and leave empty what God would fill with God's gracious gift of peace and joy.