

September 22, 2019  
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Proverbs 3:5-12 'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus  
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Proverbs 3:5-11                      The Inclusive Bible

Trust God with all your heart, and don't rely on your own understanding; acknowledge God in everything you do, and God will direct your paths. Don't be wise in your own eyes; revere God and avoid evil. This will provide health to your body, and enrichment to your bones. Honor God with all that you have, and with the first and best part of what you create; then your silos will be filled with wheat and your barrels filled with wine.

We have been talking about hymns because the words that we sing teach us about God and that understanding seeps into our soul. Today I want us to think about when life isn't all bright and shiny. Louisa Stead wrote 'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus. She was born in 1850 in England but moved to Cincinnati when she was 21. She married and had a daughter Lily. When her daughter was four years old, the family decided to go to the beach in New York. While they were eating their picnic lunch, they heard cries of help and saw a drowning boy in the sea. Louisa's husband went to go help, but the struggling boy pulled his rescuer under water with him, and both Louisa's husband and the boy that he had tried to rescue drowned before the terrified eyes of Louisa and her daughter. Out of her questions of why, came the words to 'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus.

Let's sing the song that she wrote. It is on P. 462 in the UMH. This song was written in 1882, and the language that is used was very common at that time in religious circles. There isn't a progression of ideas in this hymn. The only story that is told is that of Jesus. If you sing all the verses, you will say Jesus' name 25 times. It is Jesus that got Louisa through. I saw writer Bob Goff this week and he said something that I have been wrestling with all week. He said, "Comfortable people don't need Jesus. Desperate people need Jesus."

One of my friends had a Wedgewood decorative pitcher that had been in their family for almost 100 years. Several years ago, it broke. He could have thrown it away but he decided to get it repaired. Normally when you get something repaired, you hide the break, but he decided to have it repaired with the kintsugi (golden joinery) method which dates back to 15<sup>th</sup> century Japanese culture. You can see where the pitcher was broken, but he said it reminds him that the place of greatest beauty is the place of brokenness, not to be hidden but accentuated and even celebrated.<sup>1</sup>

The words that Louisa Stead wrote don't make her husband's death make more sense. I don't believe that God needed another angel or that it was God's plan or God's will for Louisa's husband to drown that day. People might say God was writing a better story for Louisa and her daughter or everything happens for a reason. But I don't believe that is true.

We want God to make us good and faithful with just a few detours along the way. But, there isn't always an explanation when your life is falling apart. Lucy Kalanithi's husband, Paul, wrote a memoir *When Breath Becomes Air* while he was dying of lung cancer at age 37. She shares about when her husband was trying to convince her that they should have a child. Lucy said to her husband, "I'm worried having to say goodbye to a child will make dying more painful." Her husband replied, "Wouldn't it be great if it did?" They decided to have a child. Willingly taking on profound experiences that are full of joy and uncertainty and pain. That is what it means to be alive.

We trust that in the power of God's Spirit, God journeys with us to comfort, uphold, and sustain us as we make our way through this world. We remember that God becomes one of us in

<sup>1</sup> Donald Smith on facebook

Jesus and that presence is with us as we experience job loss, divorce, cancer, death, or the unexpected.

I love being a pastor because I am privileged to walk with people at really hard moments in their lives, like at the death of a loved one. One of the prayers that I say at a memorial service says this, “Eternal God, you have shared with us the life of \_\_\_\_\_. Before she was ours, she is yours. For all that she has given us to make us what we are, for that of her which lives and grows in each of us, and for her life that in your love will never end, we give you thanks.” It is an acknowledgment that our loved ones belong first to God. We get to enjoy their love and the gift of who they are.

Trusting God with all your heart, not relying on your own understanding, seems to be about unclenching our fist and letting go. It is something that many of us don’t learn until we have to and some of us never learn at all. As humans we want to cling and possess. When we can unclench our fists and let go, we discover a freedom, an openness, an ability to be focused on God and Jesus over all people and all creation. Cling to God to discover who and whose you are, don’t cling to your job, your relationships, your wealth or your poverty, your successes or your failures.

Trusting God is about realizing that Jesus takes center stage in our lives. When someone makes a proclamation of faith in this church, they are asked this question, “Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?” Put your whole trust in his grace. That means your calendars, your wallets, your loved ones, your hearts, all of it. That is how we live fully and abundantly.

Trusting God is about realizing that life is about using your gifts and your abilities not only for yourself and for those you love, but for all of God’s people. I have been working on an organizational chart, I know, so exciting! At the top of our org chart as Greenland Hills is Christ. We exist first for people who aren’t here, we exist for others, we exist for people outside these walls. Then, we exist to care for one another. We exist to point to Christ first for others, and then for ourselves.

At the end of May Wes Allen called me. Wes is a preaching professor at Perkins School of Theology at SMU and a part of Greenland Hills Church. Wes told me about a UCC church that had been hoping to merge with another UCC church but it looked like the merger was not going to happen. He said that they might need a place to worship. He told me about their church and it looked like our church, families, LGBTQ folks, youth. He introduced me to Rev. Jo Hudson from New Church UCC and we began to pray together. We kept talking throughout the summer and I started to talk to our leaders here at Greenland Hills. Instead of clenched fists, I found open palms. Have you ever noticed how you act differently when you have a clenched fist versus open palms? When your fist is clenched, you are angry. When our palms are open, we have an easier time being calm. We can’t be defensive with our palms toward the sky. There is something that links the position of our bodies and the position of our hearts. Palms open means we are strong enough to be vulnerable, even with our enemies. Even when we have been tremendously wronged. Jesus was palms open, to the end.<sup>2</sup>

I don’t know what the future will bring with New Church UCC and Greenland Hills UMC. I do know that they are good people, and I hope that you have met some of them. I do know that we will worship together in November when Global Village Market takes over the

<sup>2</sup> Goff, Bob. Love Does. Pg. 205.

church. I do know that we exist as a church not only for us here, but especially for those who aren't here.

In Genesis we hear the story of Joseph with his coat of many colors. His brothers sell him into slavery in a fit of jealous rage. Later, when Joseph helps his brothers he tells them, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good..." (Genesis 50:20) Meant is the Hebrew word for wove. You wove evil but God rewove it together for good. Joseph deposited all the tattered shreds of his life into the careful hands of God, who just picked up the threads of hate and deceit and abandonment and injustice and refashioned them into a truly beautiful story. God used all the same threads. God didn't create a replica. God didn't start from scratch. God didn't throw the destroyed original in the trash and begin again with all new material. It took 22 years but God rewove what was torn into a stronger version than the first.<sup>3</sup>

As people the one thing that unites us all is that we all will suffer. When we are suffering, there is an opportunity for us to be radically human with one another, perhaps doing nothing more than reaching across the table, clasping hands, and crying together. We can create a safe place for someone to mourn, providing presence and empathy. May we be a people who are quick to empathize, because life is so very hard. Until God reweaves all things, people are dying for a cold cup of water in their pain.

God can make anything beautiful again and use it to heal us and make us sturdier. God can resurrect our lives. In Genesis 12 God tells Abram to go to the land that God will show them. God says, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." Abram sets off on that journey, not knowing where he would go, but he knows that God goes with him on the way. Thanks be to God, Amen.

<sup>3</sup> Hatmaker, Jen. "Of Mess and Moxie." P. 247.