

Faith Mennonite Church  
 July 12, 2009  
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### Reeds of God

*Isaiah 42:1-9; Ephesians 4:1-7; 11-16*

I have been privileged to walk with Joetta in her early days as a pastor, and I rejoice with you today as we celebrate together Joetta's calling and gifts and ordination for pastoral ministry.

Not long ago Joetta shared with me a conversation that she and Gerald had had with a former colleague (and supervisor) of hers at the College of St. Catherine. This colleague was asking Joetta about how she liked her work as a pastor, and Gerald said something about "*Joetta being great at this.*" The colleague asked: "*In what ways is she great?*" After a pause Gerald quoted from Isaiah 42: "*A bruised reed he will not break.*"

SO this is where we begin today... With these images from the servant song in Isaiah 42... LARGE images of a Servant who is LIGHT TO THE NATIONS... Who brings Justice to the earth... And TENDER images of One who does so by being gentle with bruised reeds and patient with dim flickers from the candles of our lives.

As I read this passage, I picture myself and all I know as *bruised reeds*... as those who both know suffering and at times cause it. What an important quality for ministry: to know ourselves and our need for mercy... and to make friends with this truth!

I have an early memory... I must have been about 4 or 5 years old, And I was standing on the sidewalk outside my home near a row of bushes. Davy Brown, my best friend, had come over to show me his latest acquisition... an addition to his fine collection of figurines of children from all over the world. I loved his collection. It stood on a shelf over his bed in his room. I wanted it... It was unlike anything I had. And his latest figurine was another child from Asia. I asked if I could hold it. And after I promised to be careful and not to break it, Davy handed it to me. After a time... when I was NOT ready to return it, I'm not sure what kind of a fight ensued, I only know the figurine hit the sidewalk and broke into many pieces. I can still remember Davy's look of horror and the tears, and my own realization that my actions had caused the pain.

That memory has never left. And what I know now is that I still carry within me that child ... the one who has the propensity to be overcome by rivalry and greed. That little girl (whose holding-on led to hurt and destruction)... she's always here. And when I acknowledge her presence, When I confess that the temptation to pounce, to react, and to grasp for more... is THIS CLOSE, That is when I experience both the need for and the wonder of a GRACE-FILLED Savior, who comes to accompany my steps, *forgiving, reviving and restoring.*

THIS ONE who does *not break the bruised reed.* And refuses to *squelch the smoldering wicks*... THIS ONE who loves the blind into seeing again, And who *longs for captives to be freed*...

THIS ONE is our salvation!

I have learned over the years that when I can treat both the bruised one AND the One who inflicts the bruising with compassion, that is how I open the door to the SPIRIT OF GOD,

who melts and molds and knits and weaves us into the community *who speaks truth* and grows up into Christ ... incarnating and embodying the SAME *TENDER, RECONCILING LOVE* we have been offered.

Parker Palmer writes:

*“Truth is often blinded by ‘shoulds’ and ‘oughts’.  
We live with images of who we should be as faithful disciples...rather than being truly transparent  
about who we are and the grand mix of it all...  
We are weakness and strength,  
limits and gifts.  
We are liabilities and assets.  
We are a great combination of darkness and Light,  
and we are called to find ourselves embraced in all of it.  
This embrace is not just fancy talk for permission to sin.  
To embrace weakness, liability and darkness as part of  
who we are gives those parts of us less sway over us...  
because all they ever wanted was to be acknowledged  
as parts of our wholeness.”*

I have a favorite poem. It appeared several years ago in the *Mennonite*. It is called:

*IMPERFECT SERVANT,*

And it was written by Goshen College Professor  
Ann Hostetler (for those who want to change the world):

*Give up perfection for just one day.  
Feel yourself a creature of flesh and bone.  
walk around in the cold, wind chafing  
your face, joints jarring as your worn  
soles pound concrete.*

*Keep walking until you face  
your deepest failure-not  
with clenched fists, not blinded  
by shame, but with detached  
curiosity that opens to  
compassion. Finger*

*the glazed wound tenderly  
as you would caress the gash  
in Christ's side. Wear it lightly  
as God's fingerprints. You see  
one doesn't travel far  
to know suffering, though you  
may carry it to the ends of the desert  
before you discover its yours.  
Before you discover the light  
failure lets into the darkness*

*Of the private soul. Polished  
by forgiveness, our failures  
are the only possible windows  
through which we truly see  
another human being.*

*All else is mirrors  
and an endless craving  
for reflection of our own worthiness.  
Remember Christ was wounded  
so he could be like you.*

WE all exist as *bruised reeds*... held within the creative hands of God. That great Artist knits us together with all our flaws, failures, and wounds into something *quite beautiful*... into a BODY of LOVERS who have tasted the BREAD of mercy and pass it on.

And so it is that we hear Paul today writing from a dark and dingy dungeon, held in chains...in physical bondage...(well aware of his bruising)...BEGGING the Church to:

*“Lead a life worthy of the calling  
to which we have been called...”*

(Note...the gifts are many but the calling is singular. THE calling is to EMBODY THE RECONCILING LOVE OF JESUS!)

*And we are to do that With all HUMILITY”*...Stripped of pretenses and defenses, we are invited as Karl Jung says:

*“to climb down ten thousand ladders  
and make friends with this clod of earth that is us”...*

And Let the GENTLENESS of the one who does not break bruised reeds  
But chooses instead to hold and treasure and work with us...

And let the PATIENCE of the one who does not smother the smoldering wicks  
of our doubting and wandering hearts...

Let THAT ONE teach us to live together And enable us to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the Bonds of Christ's own Peace! I just returned from the Assembly of Mennonite Church USA at Columbus...where I saw the Spirit of God at work among us.

There were pink shirt Mennos (who were visibly supporting the inclusion of our gay and lesbian, bisexual, and transgender brothers and sisters)... and there were also those who in the hallways who were Shaking Bibles in the Pink Menno's faces, grieved by what seemed to them *a transgression of the Holy Word.*

Two sides of an important issue facing the church.

Last Saturday evening as I was waiting for the service to begin, there in the aisle right in front of me I saw a Pink-shirter and a Bible-shaker standing with their arms around each other's shoulders. At first I could see that they were laughing together, and then I heard the one sharing with the other about the illness of his spouse, and I saw that when they turned around,

there were tears of compassion as they embraced...  
 Respect and Love were flowing over the great divide...  
*Aha!... I thought ...Jesus is here!*

The call of God's Spirit to plant justice on the earth  
 begins when we can embrace each other in our bruising.

This past January when I was in Guatemala, I heard the story of Ketchi, a poor Mayan village in the mountains there, where people from both sides of the recent Civil War live down the street from each other. Both former guerillas and former military soldiers are NEIGHBORS!  
 These are people who killed each other's loved ones. And we can only imagine the Hostility that has existed where the BARRIARS of hatred and anger are so thick.

5 or 6 years ago mass graves from the War were uncovered. (Over 600 of these graves were discovered.) And one of these grave-sites was discovered outside Ketchi. Villagers came to identify the bodies of their loved ones. And as they saw a familiar shirt or shoe They began to weep...Grief came pouring out. *Everyone had lost someone.*

Seeing each other's tears, They began to reach for one another... embracing each other in their mutual pain... And a great melting occurred.

Then someone began praying aloud... Praying for healing. Praying for forgiveness.  
 That day the dividing walls came tumbling down in Ketchi. They found each other in their mingled tears. Only the Spirit of God can bring that kind of reconciling life out of death.

*"Live a life worthy of the calling  
 to which you have been called"...*

Paul begs us to take on the ministry of reconciliation. And the Body of Christ is given a multitude of gifts to fulfill this SINGLE calling.

The people of God are challenged to a vision that is huge in Isaiah...  
*Justice for all the nations...*

And the servant song we are given there says it will come

- not through *loud bellowing in the streets ...*
- not from *breaking and casting aside the flawed reeds...*
- not from *snuffing out the smoldering wicks...*

but through tender compassion... through gentleness with each other's bruising...  
 through patience with each other's doubts and wandering.... Through our loving not only the bruised ones but also the ones who inflict the bruising.

Can we not see it?

God with large knitting needles, And a weaver's loom,  
 Holding our convoluted lives Working with all us bruised reeds AND bringing us together into the Body of Christ... into a wondrous work of art!

A body fully dependent on the Head.. On our Lord and Savior Jesus to lead us into an alternative community with the largest of all visions:  
*justice for all the nations  
 and the promised reign of God today and forever...*

*The Way of Christ's Peace is before us...*

And today we are celebrating the calling of Joetta, Affirming her gifts and ordaining her as the pastoral leader of this congregation. Gerald described her as “*a bruised reed that our Loving God will not break*”... And I know her to be One who is honest with herself and with you. She has accepted your call and God's call to be your pastor.. to love you as a Shepherd, to proclaim the Word, to work collaboratively with your giftedness in the mission of God's reconciling love.

Joetta will sit with you where you ache, Offering you the fruit of her prayers, her trust in our Lord and Savior, and her best wisdom.

She will challenge you to grow in faithfulness to the calling to which you have been called. And with your combined giftedness as a community of faith. I am confident more light will come to this city and more justice will come to the nations.

In closing, I offer us all this blessing:

May we, together as the BODY OF CHRIST,  
*bruised and sometimes smoldering,*  
*Forgiven* and continually being  
remade, revived and restored...  
More fully and more *truthfully*  
grow up into Jesus and embody his reconciling love.  
And may *the Breath of God's own life*  
come sweeping through us all. Amen!