

Epiphany 6, Year B  
Psalm 30  
February 15, 2009

Trinity Episcopal Church  
Sonoma, CA

But Joy Comes in the Morning:  
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

One of the songs I love to sing is “Precious Lord, take my hand.” Do you know the song? it goes like this:

Precious Lord, take my hand, □ Lead me on, help me stand,  
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn, □  
Through the storm, through the night, □  
Lead me on to the, □  
Take my hand, precious light Lord, □ Lead me home.

I often think of the song and it’s writing when I am tired, weak and worn. It was written by Tommy Dorsey—not the Tommy Dorsey we know so well. But another Tommy Dorsey. A blues man and a band leader. He wrote it not long after his wife died in childbirth. In times when I wonder if I can go on, I think of the song and the story behind it.

What are the songs you sing to yourself when you are filled with grief? What are the stories you tell yourself? What The places in your heart you turn to? What do you say to those closest to you when you are disappointed? What do you do when deep sadness fills your heart? What are the phrases you turn to? The images you summon up? Sometimes disappointment, grief and sadness can turn to anger. Sometimes to a sense of helplessness. Sometimes depression. I’ve found myself wondering this week—wondering about the handholds that carry folks through such hard times: times that shatter your understandings of your life and the life around you; times of deep fear or grief or sadness.

I look at the pictures of those killed in the plane crash in Buffalo—the woman who called the world’s attention to the Rwanda genocide, the widow whose husband was killed in 9/11, the hockey player returning for an alumni game, members of a rock band on their way to do a show, a pilot who loved the challenge of flying in rough weather. I look at them and I wonder about their survivors. What’s carrying them through? What’s holding them up?

I find myself remembering the disciples and wondering how they got through the hours and the days after Jesus was nailed to the Cross. How did they get through that first dark night—huddled as they were behind locked doors. How did they pass their time? What sustained them in those dark hours?

Perhaps one of them recalled a fragment of a psalm and spoke it to the rest.

O LORD my God, I cried out to you,  
and you restored me to health.

You brought me up, O LORD, from the dead;  
you restored my life as I was going down to the grave.

Thus prompting another to chime in,

Weeping may spend the night,  
but joy comes in the morning.

I suspect those words were ones said not so much with confidence as with hope. Words maybe springing from the past and pointing to a future. Words that summoned up stories from their lives and the lives of those who had gone before them that gave flesh and bones to the moments of joy that follow the times of weeping.

Perhaps together they wove a tapestry of stories—stories of times in their lives—both with Jesus and before—when they wondered if there would be a morning; times when God’s face was hidden from them. I imagine the psalms and stories helped get them through that first long night and the nights that followed. I know that’s true for me. Is it true for you as well?

When you encounter times so hard you wonder if the weeping has come to stay, do you turn to moments in your life or in the lives of those you know that echo out resoundingly:

Weeping may spend the night,  
but joy comes in the morning.

My mom often told the story of the time she spent in the TB ward of the county hospital. She was there for three years. The TB had spread from her lungs to her intestines. At the lowest point she weighed only 70 pounds. But the story never stopped there—she never stopped with her despair. It wasn’t only a story about how hard it was for her. Instead, she always ended the story with an account of the cold gray winter day she asked the nurse attending her, “Do you think there is green grass under that snow?” The nurse didn’t answer. She went about her business and then left the room. Twenty minutes later she was back. Her hand was cold and wet. She opened it and offered mom a clump of green grass.

Weeping may spend the night,  
but joy comes in the morning.

Mom always said that that was a turning point for her. That green grass coming to life under the cold snow gave her hope. And she always told the story just about two weeks after my brother or I had suffered some great disappointment. She gave us time to feel the grief and fear, the anger and sadness, and then she told her tale of the night of weeping and the morning of joy. After all—she was living proof that joy comes and stays!

We all have such stories. I have mine. You have yours. And we, together, are forming ours. It helps to remember such stories when times are tough. It helps to tell and hear them.

But most of all it helps to remember that we are always living into God’s great story of accompanying us in our sadness and our grief and bringing us to mornings of joy and delight.

Perhaps you remember what happened the morning after the long night the disciples spent huddling behind locked doors. The women rose early and made their way to the tomb. The stone was rolled away. An angel met them and said, “Do not be afraid. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth. He has gone before you to Galilee. Go and tell the others.” As they hurried down the road, they were stopped. Stopped by Jesus. Stopped in their tracks. He said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” Not long thereafter he met them at a mountain in Galilee. Remember what he said to them? He said, “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

That’s what I hold onto when times get tough. I hold on to that promise that Jesus is with us to the end of the age. That’s some handhold—one that can carry folks through hard times! Take my hand, Precious Lord, take my hand.