

THIS WEEK AT THE CREEK

June 6, 2009

“When I first found out I was bi-polar my self-esteem became very low. I felt worthless. The medication was a reminder of all that was wrong with me. The soulful, dramatic depths of depression, as well as the brilliant, soaring, one-with-God type peaks of the manic side were being somewhat evened out by the medication. But I was still sick with self-loathing. A devotional about Ezekiel made me take notice. Here was a person far more manic-depressive than I was. He had erratic behavior, he was misunderstood by everyone, and he had panoramic visions very much at odds with everyday reality. Even with all of this, God was still able to act through Ezekiel. Finding a small bit of myself in a character in the Bible began the real healing...the healing of my self-esteem. I wish that everyone could find a character in the Bible they can relate to. It is an affirmation of love from across the ages. For me, it meant that God can clothe even my dry bones with life; that God can use me too, as he once did Ezekiel, as a small wheel within a wheel of God’s universe.” -- Teresa Lowen

Dear Cross Creeker:

Last year I did something that I had never done before as a pastor. I auctioned off a sermon.

You may remember that last May we had this new and exciting fundraising event called a “service auction.” People offered up all kinds of things to be auctioned off. Dan and I bought the services of **Em Bruns** and her truck for four hours for \$100.00, and with her help we hauled away a lot of yard debris. I also bought the services of **Tom Lowen**, who shined my shoes for \$10.00. My shoes have never looked better! Others bought a ticket to a high tea for six people offered by **Betty and Bill Youngkin**, others a ticket to a Tuscan dinner for eight sponsored by **Darrell Bickley** and **Anne Henry**, and still others an opportunity to include their car in a road rally organized by **Steve Donegia and Sue Voisard**. **Tom and Jan Harry** bought a different home-made pie every month for a year cooked by **Nancy Tepfer**. **Steve Sackman** purchased the services of musicians **Rick and Hillary Wagner** for a private party. And on and on it went... When it was all said and done, the “service auction” raised \$10,000 in one night to support the work of the church. And it was fun too! Some even said it was the most fun they had ever had at church.

Well, reluctantly, under some “friendly” pressure from the service auction organizers (**Sonya Harry** and **Nance Holland**), I agreed to put a sermon up for auction. The **Rev. Tom Harry**, Sonya’s dad, had done it at Normandy United Methodist Church for years, and I thought to myself, “If a Methodist can do it, I can do it too!”

What I was actually auctioning off was the right to name the “topic” for one of my sermons! Tom told me that one of the more peculiar topics that people had named for him was to preach about “Star Wars.” Upon hearing that, my anxiety increased!

My sermon went for \$150.00 at auction. I asked **Tom Harry** how much his sermon went for at Normandy and he told me that in the past few years it had been going for somewhere around \$2000.00. I tried hard not to take that too personally! But upon learning of the amount my sermon went for, Tom was quick to offer words of comfort and reassurance, saying, “Oh, when I first started offering a sermon at the auction that is about the amount it went for too.” I felt somewhat better.

Teresa Lowen was the one – okay the *only* one -- to offer the winning bid. At the service auction she told me that she really didn’t have a topic in mind. She said she wanted to think about. And she did. Finally, she told me that all she wanted me to do was preach from the book of **Ezekiel** because that was her favorite prophet. I was relieved at her request! Like Teresa, I love Ezekiel too! And in mainline churches, it is a book rarely preached from as only two passages show up in the Lectionary cycle.

What I didn’t expect was for Teresa to also share more deeply about an important part of her life story – her struggle with Bipolar Disorder – with her request. With her permission, I have shared her comments at the top of the page. And beyond all the fun and anxieties that auctioning off a sermon posed for me, it actually ended blessing me immensely. And my hope is that somehow a silly act of auctioning off a sermon will bless you too!

One of the greatest blessings we have in being a part of community of faith is creating a space where people can their stories and struggles. One of the distinctive values of our church states: *“We believe that the community of faith should be free and encouraged to manifest authenticity in their personal lives and yearn for continuous growth without fear of judgment and condemnation, and*

where open and authentic sharing is met by grace, hope and love and the desire of God's people to be a part of the process of healing, transformation, and renewal.” Mental illness is often one of those struggles that is never named in church for fear of shame or judgment or exclusion. I am glad that Teresa feels safe enough to name her struggle with Bipolar Disorder among us and to trust us with it. She has blessed us with her authenticity. I hope that we as a church will do our part and be a source of strength and grace for her on the journey! That's the give and take of a grace-filled community.

Our church's vision hymn sings: *“Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard; and loved and treasured, taught and claimed as words within the Word.”* Through the peculiar act of buying a sermon at auction, Teresa has named some of her story for us. In so doing, her testimony has not only brought our Sacred Scriptures to life, but she has showed us by her experience how we can encounter the Spirit Speaking God somewhere off the pages of scripture – in the context of our own lives – and how the Spirit can still make dry bones live!

Peace,

MIKE CASTLE, Pastor

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IN WORSHIP THIS WEEKEND

This weekend we will gather for worship and the ancient prophet **EZEKIEL** will be our guide. **PASTOR MIKE** will be offering a prompting entitled *“The Spirit in Ezekiel”* based on the reading from Ezekiel 37:1-14. **MINDI MAYNARD** will be singing a new song called *“Free to be Me”* by **Francesca Battistelli**. We'll also be celebrating communion together.

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For a complete listing of events, please go to www.crosscreekchurch.org.

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HEAR YE! HEAR YE! HEAR YE! CONGREGATIONAL MEETING CALLED: JUNE 14 at 5:00 PM

The following items of business will be considered:

- 1) Review and affirm the “potential use plan” (PUP) for the Cross Creek Church property that has been developed by Ken Brightman, architect. Ken will make the presentation and answer questions. Drawings are posted on our webpage at www.crosscreekchurch.org.
- 2) Affirm a covenant with Ohio Interfaith Power and Light as proposed by Justice and Witness Ministry's Green Team.

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PROPOSED CONGREGATIONAL COVENANT WITH OHIO INTERFAITH POWER AND LIGHT

Eco-Justice Cross Creek AKA The Green Team is asking Cross Creek to vote at the June 14th congregational meeting to affirm a covenant with Ohio Interfaith Power and Light (OhIPL), a group that mobilizes a religious response to climate change and that promotes energy conservation, energy efficiency and renewable energy.

The proposed covenant is that “Cross Creek Community Church pledges to support the goals of Ohio Interfaith Power and Light, in part by engaging in an ongoing process of education with our members concerning energy production and usage in relation to climate change.”



More information about OhIPL is available at the Justice and Witness bulletin board in the church hallway, on the church website at <http://www.crosscreekchurch.org/green>, or by asking any Green Team member (look for the green dot on our nametags).