

PILGRIMS PROGRESS APRIL 2010
PILGRIM CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
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REVEREND SALLY BALMER, PASTOR AND TEACHER

Message from Sally

Empty and Thin....!

Doesn't that sound boring? Lifeless? What kind of Easter message includes "empty and thin?"

Except there's the "empty tomb" story... "he's not here!" The grave: empty. And those ensuing "thin" stories--whereby some Jesus-figure (not always recognized) shows up into rooms with locked doors, appears as a stranger alongside a road, disappears after bread is broken. Some of us must be relieved when at least one story has him eating fish, whew!

To be first of all concerned about literal historicity is to miss....something. These stories needed to be told, but they're a bit, er, ...thin. The "empty tomb" reported by the women just didn't pass muster ("a bit thin," the guys might have said, rolling their eyes). At least Peter hustled on to check the tomb out for himself.

Empty? Check. Thin? Most certainly, if one considers the early description from the Celtic tradition of "thin places." They would call those spaces-and-places "thin" where people strongly felt a connection to the sacred. Perhaps alluding to the lifting of a veil between worlds, a startling amazement, a wordless understanding.

For all our emphasis on the beauty of "everyday sacred," there is something to be said for moments empty, moments thin. They may involve the glory of open space or the hollowness of tragedy. They reveal our vulnerability and the reality of the ineffable. "Thick" just won't do. These moments are less like molasses....and more like baptismal water.

Which brings me to this **Easter Sunday, April 4**, with the happy baptism of Andrew Lewis Fischer. Let's just say we "empty" much of the waters and find ourselves in that "thin" place of grace. We'll also share in our first-Sunday communion-- quite the "Easter basket" of a day. Add to that the encouragement to bring any and all kinds of flowers!

I'll also be here for a beginning nod to Earth Day (which is actually later in the week) on **Sunday, April 18**. And the last Sunday of the month (the 25th) some of us will be over in Wenatchee at our **Annual Meeting of the Pacific Northwest Conference** of the United Church of Christ. I find the time is invaluable, with a wonderful mix of colleagues, all kinds of UCC church people, and times of worship, learning, and decision.

This summer I'll be learning more about the "ancient gifts" we've received from the Celtic Christians. In my more recent class, though, was when I would hear persons share of their "thin places." We'll begin doing that, too, on our Sunday mornings. Consider this your invitation for reflection. . .

Yours in the rising, surprising, let's-keep-surmising joy!
Sally

an alleluia

He went up to Jerusalem
to teach his followers again
that all could live in love despite oppression
some listened, did not understand
it was commitment this command
to love our God, our neighbors, our betrayers.
alleluia alleluia alleluia alleluia

The people seemed self occupied
some said he preached, some said he lied
they came and took him
when it came down to it.
though sentenced to a cross of pain
he breathed his last
and darkness reigned
in peace his truth rang out an alleluia.
alleluia alleluia alleluia alleluia

They went to roll away the stone
he was not there his body gone
and yet they felt he moved among them freely
his saving grace was sowing sparks
of wisdom we can still impart
that we too live a mighty alleluia
alleluia alleluia alleluia alleluia

the hour is now
this day the day
eternal love is now our way
we sing a reverent round of alleluia.
alleluia alleluia alleluia
ALLELUIA

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Easter

Bursting forth from dark
nature's sheer strength
brute force of buds
bulbs and roots, exploding
nerve without knowing
all cells insisting on
the abundance of life

© Marcia Neu



Camilia bud - ©Marcia Neu

Words from Our Moderator

Here it is the first of the month again. I know this because Marcia Neu told me it's time to write another report for the April Pilgrims Progress. So here goes.

Last month I talked about some of our recent history and that ours is a covenanting congregation and we are responsible for our future. I also said that no matter whom we are or what our circumstances, each of us can contribute to the well-being of the church, whether it be physical, intellectual or monetary. Well, next month there will be an opportunity to contribute our physical labors to the church. This will be in the form of our annual All Church Work Day. This is an opportunity to catch up on all of those little things that accumulate during the year and need fixing, both inside the church and outside the church. This event will take place on Saturday May 8, from 10:00 am until 2:00 pm. Lunch will be served (homemade chili). The things that immediately come to mind are work in the south garden (weeding etc.), fixing the front sidewalk, replacing some of the basement window panes, pressure washing the ramp, spring cleaning the upstairs, vacuuming the stair wells, repainting the stripes in the parking lot, etc. As you can see there are tasks for all levels of skills. I would hope that we can make this a well represented event (bring the kids) and get a lot of these nagging tasks completed.

In subsequent months I will talk about other ways that each of us can contribute to our church's well-being.

I have meet with both Rev. Sally and Bill Malcomson about the make-up of the members of the Long Range Planning Committee. Bill submitted a list of names which I shared with Sally. Sally and I approved of the list and Bill is in the process of asking the members to serve.

The end of this month our Conference Annual Meeting will be held in Wenatchee. Your church's delegates besides myself are Rev. Sally, Bill Malcomson and Sonia Barrantes. Maybe we can get Bill or Sonia to give us a report after they get back.

More about things next month.

--Tom Miller, Moderator

Upcoming Events

Upcoming April Sundays

We will have two guests in our pulpit in April. On April 11, The Reverend Jerry Bongard will return to speak. Our own The Reverend Roger Ridgway will speak on April 25 while Sally attends the NW Conference Meetings east of the mountains.

New UCC commercial set to 'spiral' on April 16

The United Church of Christ will launch its next "God is Still Speaking" commercial on April 16, utilizing the church's best broadcasting arsenal: its own members. "Yes, a new Stillspeaking ad is coming," says the Rev. Felix Carrion, coordinator of the UCC's Stillspeaking Ministry, "and what makes this debut so significant is that we are counting on the moxy of our million-plus supporters to spiral this viral message around the world. We're asking people to set aside that morning — April 16 — for unparalleled texting and emailing." For more details, go to <http://www.ucc.org/news/tech-savvy-outreach.html>.

"Dinner at the Brick" Organizational Meeting – April 17 – Anacortes Library

Janet & Tom Miller and Nancy Chapman have participated in two "Dinner At The Brick" last year. These dinners are held on Sunday afternoon at the Presbyterian Church and hosted by various groups throughout Anacortes. Pilgrim was invited to participate with a group that includes the Bahia, Buddhists, Catholics and the Center for Spiritual Living. We would like others at Pilgrim to participate, so if you are interested, please call one of us. There is an organizational meeting on April 17 at the Library. Our two dates for the dinners are June 6 and September 26. Contact Nancy Chapman if you have questions.

All Church Work Day at Pilgrim – May 8

Everyone is encouraged to come and lend a hand to work in the garden and all around the church on Saturday, May 8, from 10 am-2 pm. Lunch will be served (homemade chili).

Children's Corner

Children's Program

On April 11 we will be making hands. You might practice "I LOVE YOU" in sign language at home. Hands are a symbol of compassion, communication and community; and we will be using this symbol in our worship space at the 2010 Annual Meeting. We would like to have each PNCUCC congregation provide us with large, small, print or plain fabric hands. As with most church work, there is no limit to the number of hands we can use!

April 18 and 25 we will be sharing more stories about Jesus.

Nelle Jacobson, Children's Ministry

News from the UCC

Leaders in the United Church of Christ are lauding health care passage as being of “the realm of God”

"We thank the members of the House of Representatives for their courage, vision, and leadership in making a wise decision and voting on what is best for people living in the United States," said the Rev. Geoffrey A. Black, the UCC's general minister and president, who was in Washington, D.C., attending the UCC-supported Ecumenical Advocacy Days when the House gave its approval to historic health care reform. "The passing of this bill moves us closer to the realm of God, a realm where mercy, compassion and love for all reigns on earth."

Black said members across the UCC are rejoicing that "the House put millions of individuals, children and families ahead of politics and egos and voted to help end the suffering of those without health insurance and to end the discriminatory practices of health insurance companies."

The Rev. Linda Jaramillo, executive minister of the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries, said, "After nearly a decade of struggling for a new health care system, this historic vote moves us closer to realizing the right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health, as proclaimed by President Franklin Roosevelt's 1943 declaration 'Freedom from Want.'"

"While we recognize that the bill is far from perfect, we know that it was necessary to pass this bill as a first step in moving our great country forward in guaranteeing that health care is a basic right," Jaramillo said.

Remembering the late Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s oft-quoted sentiment, "Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and inhuman," Barbara Baylor, the UCC's minister for health care justice, said, "This day will go down in history as the first time that we can dare to believe that perhaps the injustice in health care will not remain the most shocking and inhuman."

"The United Church of Christ will continue to speak prophetically that health care is not only a basic human right but a human need that includes everyone," Baylor said. "We will continue to work with the faith community and the Administration to make sure that the bill is perfected and our health care system is inclusive, accessible, affordable and accountable or everyone."

Demonstrate U.S. commitment to international justice

The [International Criminal Court](#) (ICC) is the world's first and only permanent international tribunal for mass atrocity crimes. It serves a vital role by helping to punish, deter, and end impunity for the world's most heinous crimes.

In November, President Obama authorized the return of US officials to the meetings of the ICC following an eight year absence under the previous administration. This new level



of constructive engagement raises hopes for the US to ratify the [Rome Statute](#), the treaty signed by over 100 nations that established the court.

In order for the US to continue to move forward in this direction, it must complete its policy review prior to the International Criminal Court Review Conference to be held in Kampala, Uganda at the end of May.

There is a danger the US will attend this important conference this spring without the policy and instructions it requires to participate effectively. A completed US policy would accelerate and intensify the US relationship with the Court and allow the United States to stand behind its commitment to international justice and human rights- especially in terms of crimes against women and children.

Time is running out! Urge the President to take action!

The [Twenty-fifth General Synod](#) of the United Church of Christ urged the President of the United States to restore our signature to the Treaty establishing the International Criminal Court. Now is the time to inform President Obama of your support for the International Criminal Court and ask him to complete the US policy on the court prior to the review conference in May.

Sign the letter below to urge President Obama to complete the US policy on the ICC before the Review Conference.

More Information

- The UCC is also engaged in supporting the ICC through its participation in the [Washington Working Group on the ICC](#).
- [2005 Synod resolution on the ICC](#)
- [Additional information on the ICC](#)

Here's the link for further information and a form for emailing President Obama:
<https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=575>

on this first warm day of Spring

on this first warm day of Spring
I re-consecrate myself to earth.
I yearn to be outside
messing with dirt.

I long see through blossom, sky, and seed,
the earth anew,
trusting it will always be there for me.
it's easy to forget I live within this giant web of life.

I must remember to respect this warming soil,
to treasure every sign of growth,
knowing in my heart earth needs me, too,
a promise that we hold together.

on this first warm day of Spring,
as I renew my covenant with earth,
I walk with consciousness my path,
both take and give, knowing the cost.

before I step into the sun-warmed air
I pause --this is a big thing that I do.
everything forevermore
depends on it.

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