

October 28, 2017 FCCS
Rev. Curran Reichert

Acceptance and Humor; Pillars of Joy

On the third day of the fires, Agua Caliente got the official word to get out a dodge. We had already been staying with my folks in Santa Rosa along with Katie's parents who were up from Southern California for what we thought was going to be a relaxing visit, **and** our neighbors and their two children. Six adults, three children, four cats and a Pip.

When we heard that our little dirt road was on mandatory evacuation me and Katie, along with her dad Steve decided to make the trek back to Sonoma; up 101, across 116 and back across Arnold to gather some things from the house and retrieve my car.

The air was so thick that day, and as we pulled into town another neighbor called to say that it was too late- there was no way we were going to be allowed onto our street. She had a friend on the fire crew who told her that the chief had just ordered them to give up Madrone and pull the defense line back to Aqua Caliente.

Katie was determined to get to the house, the voice on the phone was telling us that there was no way, my father in law was turning white in the back seat. I felt a pit of fear in my gut- even if we could get in, what if we couldn't get out- all because of a car and a few pictures. Already the line to get out of town stretched as far as the eye could see.

I was ready to lose it when, without incident, we turned left down Agua Caliente and onto our road. We calmly loaded up both cars and headed back to the exit route, only to realize that my car was totally out of gas. Long slow lines to get out of town and a car with no gas- not a good combination. We inched down the highway toward town, passing service stations with sold out and closed signs.

So far this is not a sermon about humor or acceptance, but it's coming...

I forgot to mention that on the way into town a parishioner called to ask that we rescue a stranger's cat. The owner was out of the country and desperate to know that her feline friend would be safe. Fortunately, the fires

never came close to that housing unit and the animal was spared because we were not able to get the cat to come to us. And why would she- three panicked people yelling, "here kitty, kitty!!!!!" I wouldn't have come out either.

Our last hope for gas was the 76 stations on the right side of the road we pulled in just as the pumps started to shut down. There was one remaining pump working and four cars desperate for gas. Afraid to turn the pump off for fear of not being able to get it to work again the fella in the front of us devised a plan. If we could pay him in cash he would keep the pump running until we all had what we needed to get out of town. It was a Laurel and Hardy episode for sure; keys dropped on the ground, wrong buttons pushed, car alarms going off, gas splashing everywhere, exasperated people and yelping pets, but we did it- and we all got back on the road.

I had the radio turned to KCVY our local station and I do not know who these two men were who were talking, but to them I am eternally grateful. They were calm and encouraging. They said they would stay on the air as long as they could and people could call with anything they were finding out. For the two hours it took to get as far as the 101 these guys kept assuring us that it was going to be ok, "keep cool my friends, we are all in this together, we know it is scary but you will all get out of here safely. Just go slow and be kind to each other." These guys, they were amazing.

Bishop Tutu says in the "Book of Joy": "We are meant to live in joy. This does not mean that life will be easy or painless. It means that we can turn our faces to the wind and accept that this is the storm we must pass through. We cannot succeed by denying what exists. The acceptance of reality is the only place from which change can begin. As one grows in the spiritual life, we are able to accept anything that happens to us, the frustrations and hardships are part of the warp and woof of life. The question is not, how do we escape it? The question is, how can we use this as something positive?" (Page 224)

I wonder if there were moments of acceptance in these past few weeks that stand out for you. One of the most profound moments I recall was a conversation with Linda States shortly after she and Randy had learned that their house had not survived. She said, "well, at least now we know. The worst was not knowing, now we can move onto the next step."

Partner share your moments of: acceptance/humor

There was a panel this week on KQED interviewing spiritual leaders in Santa Rosa to see how they handled the crisis and if they had any advice for recovery. I appreciated what the Buddhist leader had to say, “there isn’t any right or wrong way to deal with this situation. Some moments you may feel like everything is ok and the very next find yourself quite overcome. Whether you lost your home or not, if you stayed in town or went somewhere for safety, we have all suffered a trauma. This is not a competition where one person is more entitled to feelings than another. Greif simply is a part of our landscape right now.”

And so it is- a part of our interior and exterior landscape. As we drive up and down HWY 12 to Santa Rosa, or over the hill to Napa or through Glen Ellen and along the backroads to Bennet Valley- the desolation we see is an external reminder of an internal reality. New growth will take as long as it takes. Lessons of acceptance and the need to laugh along the way are all around us. Scripture tells us that the greatest commandment is to love God, to love ourselves, and to love each other.

But it’s the voice of those radio guys I’m holding on to, “remember everybody, just go slow and be kind to each other.”

Amen