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Up-sign Down
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Sermon Notes:

If I were to ask you to place yourself in some future time and look back to this time, how would you describe where you are now, in terms of: It was a time *when*...

For me, I might describe this as a time *when* I was in the midst of a transition at Jan Hus Presbyterian Church and Neighborhood House.

And how would you judge or categorize that time to which you look back to. For example, I might describe it as a time *when* we started in with receiving and distributing mail for six hundred people a week who had no permanent address and watched it increase to seven hundred.

And you...

This morning there is a story about the **Somali** pirates releasing a British couple they had kidnapped more than a year ago, after ransom was paid. How would they describe that time *when* they were held captive...

Or in **Haiti** this morning, on the heels of describing a time *when* the earthquake hit and still living through all the aftermath, the people of Haiti now see a time *when* cholera, disease, tainted water supplies are threatening their loved ones and lives once more...

And in **Myanmar** this morning, Burmese pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi was released following 15 years of being detained, basically under house arrest for her pro-democracy stance by the military government...

Or, for the families and friends of Tyler **Clementi** and other youth bullied – still grieving, violently attacked youth, sometimes taking their own lives simply because they were gay, lesbian, Bisexual, transgender, or perceived to be...this by some would be described as a time *when* hate had the upper hand.

Anything that we look back at from some future point always brings a certain level of **clarity, understanding, or healing** that comes with time. We are used to seeing the start of things from a past point to where they are now...

We are used to “markers” along the way; **signs** that we see or scour for and then scour more for their meaning through past occurrences or future resolution.

Signs, signs, everywhere a sign...

And when we pray to God, however we know God, we often seek answers to this *when*. We often seek order to the confusion or dilemma at hand. And we look above and beyond – to the endless sea and the fathomless sky. **We look up.**

My friend Janie Spahr, an amazing woman, minister, and openly lesbian activist within the PC(USA) and the broader queer community, has a little ditty she will sometimes sing to remind people not to lose heart. It’s called “Mrs. Fox Terrier...” and it goes like this:

Mrs. Fox Terrier said to her pups, “In all life’s adversities, keep your tail up!

Keep you tail up, keep your tail up,
In all life’s adversities, keep your tail up!”

And, as solid as that advice is...the signs we look up for – the **Up-signs** are really down here. There is no way to travel legitimately to a **future now** or even accurately re-enter a **past of even a day** away, a past that is more obscured with each day’s with mounting events. And if we could enter the future or the past – look forward or back with accuracy – **would we be doing what we are now?**

I stepped outside the canonical writings this morning to one of the gospels that never made it in, The Acts of John. Our Call to Worship this morning is from there and it may be familiar. It is know as the *Round Dance of the Cross*. In it, Jesus doesn’t starts out by saying, “Look to the future, look to the past” – he begins with:

“Glory be to you God
Glory to you, word. Glory to you grace.
Glory to you spirit, holy one, to your glory.
We praise you, we give thanks to you, light, in whom no darkness is.

It’s a **greeting**. And, like most greetings, it is in the present. It’s praise. It’s being. It’s being in and with and of – it is the *when* of God. **Now.**

Our unison prayer or prayer of forgiveness takes this present God, this *now/when* even further. The poet Thomas Trahern talks about the impossibility of dividing

up God into love of others and love of God. He goes so far as to say God cannot be the beloved – for we are the beloved and love others because of that truth. No more can God be divided from all God is of which we are a part – than we can divide God from this instant, and this one, and this one...

In the tradition in which I grew up, we went to **confession**. For those of you who might not know, that's when, at the time, you would go into a special sort of room in the back of the church, kneel before the priest, shrouded behind a curtain or metal window of somekind and confess your sins. {I always knew he knew it was me...} Then the priest would give you absolution.

I lived with the idea, I was taught the idea to **get to that box** so that when your time came you had nothing on your blemished soul to hold you back from heaven. Maybe a few decades in **purgatory**, but not the other place. We lived looking not for signs of God – but signs of the end – so we could beat it.

Last rites...

The promise of **Isaiah** in today's reading was a promise of an end to fighting, **not to despair**, that God was/is with them and to have heart. Do not despair. When? Not in the future. Do not despair now.

Last week, I talked about **the +1 of God**. That is that after we imagine everything there is, after we take science and wonder and knowledge to the very end – there is more. It is the +1, the I Am, the God that is more than time, space, words...the final destination +1

This is not to suggest that we don't seek God – a Higher Power – a specific deity in a particular religious belief, on the contrary. We are always called to seek, to be aware...**just not to be rich in future or past – but poor/read humble in the present!**

On the cover of today's bulletin, I pulled the beginning stanzas *Thunder: Perfect Mind Thunder Perfect Mind* an extended, riddling monologue, in which an immanent saviour speaks a series of paradoxical statements concerning the **divine feminine nature**. These paradoxical utterances echo **Greek identity riddles**, a common poetic form in the Mediterranean. It is thought to have been written in Alexandria, perhaps as far back as 350 BCE. Often associated with **Sophia, the feminine presence of God, the Shekinah**, what was there (?) before there was there...this ancient poem carries the same message:

(I) I am found by you who seek me – **am found!**

- (II) Hear me – **hear**
- (III) You, waiting for me – take me into your hearts. **Take**

In the present.

Ask ourselves,

how do we find God, hear God,

take God into our hearts?

- (IV) And, “Not banish God from our vision.”

We live in the light of **completion**. But we have morphed completion to mean **finish** something. And, yes, there is that. There are those now wondering, “When is he going to finish?!” But it’s a different completion. **The completion of the +1**, the loved and beloved.

If that completion is clear, at least in terms of being consciously in contact with such a presence, the *when* we live, the now, the flattening of the Up-sign to the here and down, the present – every relationship we have will change, and theirs will change, and those they touch...

It is the **New Jerusalem of Isaiah** and Jesus takes it further telling us not to look for any grand and elegant structures to signal the completion.

Look at the questions they asked: **“Teacher when will this all be, what will be the sign...”**

And Jesus with the wisdom of the ancients and those who would follow says

“Do not go after them” “Them being those who promise to know such things.

“Do not be terrified,” he said. No matter what happens to you. “Not a hair on your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls...” **endurance: day by day; gain your souls – grow in your souls.**

He didn’t say things wouldn’t happen. He didn’t say horrible things wouldn’t happen. Jesus didn’t, Isaiah didn’t, the ancients didn’t, and I won’t either. They all remind us, though, that this when – now - there is more than we see.

I don't know why God, however you know God, lives in and among us as God does - as we who love and are Beloved. I don't know why it is sometimes so hard in this world. I do believe it's all part of that which I just can't understand, don't need to understand, except to believe it's all part of that +1.

What I do know is that for all the wonder and beauty I see when I look up and beyond the horizon, there is more here in our seeking conscious contact with God and with God in one another than we can know. And it **trumps** everything. That awareness that we walk with God – together – is the greatest potential for changing this world in each of our lives, and it happens with every step we take.

St. Paul somewhere said. "Pray without ceasing." For me that means knowing, remembering, being open to be reminded that God is...and seeing everything we do as a prayer. There's a challenge. Can we see prayer even in the things we wish we didn't do. Hmm...another sermon perhaps.

The future, God, is now. I pray for justice in Myamar; I pray and support those in Haiti and other places going through such struggles; I grieve with the families of Tyler Clementi and others; and I seek God in all things.

Let us do so together. Join us, invite us to join you in bringing the Up-signs back down to earth and one another.
It's all here for the asking – right now.

Amen.