

"Looking to the Hills"  
Psalm 121:1-8; Matthew 6:24-35  
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Cottage Grove United Church of Christ  
Cottage Grove, Minnesota  
Sunday, 19 June, 2011  
Trinity Sunday  
Pastor Gold's Last Sunday  
Father's Day

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There are a lot of emotions swirling around in this sanctuary today. I, for one, am feeling just about every emotion it is possible to feel. My *strongest* emotion today is sadness. Sadness that things did not work out as we had hoped and sadness because I will miss this church a great deal. Fear is pretty high up there too, as I worry about this time of transition and what will happen next for Ben and me. I know many of you are feeling sad today too, and afraid about the future of Cottage Grove United Church of Christ. There is anger in this sanctuary today, and there is happiness. Of course, not *all* of these emotions are related to my departure or have anything at all to do with the church. Regardless of what or why we are feeling the way we are, *what do we do* with all of these emotions?

I turn this morning to the words of the Psalmist: "I lift my eyes to the hills -- from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." No matter *what* we are feeling today -- sadness, fear, anger, or even joy -- we need not just wallow in our feelings or feel them alone. *We must* not feel that we are alone as individuals or as a church, because that is *never* the case. No. God is constantly drawing us close, whoever we are or wherever we are on life's journey. In the words of the Psalm, "The Lord is your keeper; the Lord will keep your life."

Today is just one tiny speck in the history of God's universe, and while this does not *negate* our feelings it does help put things in perspective. It reminds us that God is greater than whatever is happening in our lives or in this church at this moment, and that God is central to life, and most certainly to the church that God created. We cannot go on without turning to God for help. Otherwise, *why bother calling ourselves followers of Christ?*

Jesus goes even further in our Gospel reading from Matthew: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Can any of you by worrying add a

single hour to your span of life? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. Strive first for the kingdom of God and for righteousness.”

Those of us who are feeling afraid today, for our own lives, for this church, or for any other reason, have these strong yet comforting words from Jesus to turn to when we are worrying ourselves sick. The Psalmist told us, and now Jesus reiterates, that *it is all about God*. Life is certainly full of scary things, but so many of the things that we expend a great deal of energy worrying about are not worth it. The thing is, *God is at the center of everything*. I do not believe this means that when terrible things happen it was all “part of God’s mysterious plan,” that “God willed that terrible thing to happen for some greater purpose.” I’m sorry, but I cannot believe that a child dying from cancer, or thousands of innocent lives being lost in an earthquake, or a woman being abused by her partner are part of some mysterious, Godly plan. That said, I *do* believe that Jesus is calling us to set most of our fears aside because God will be with us through whatever comes to pass. No matter what comes next for you, for me, or for this church, God will be there, providing guidance and strength.

The journey that we human beings take through life is winding, and it takes us many places that we may not have expected to go. Sometimes life journeys converge, when a child is born into a family, when a friendship is formed, a relationship begun...or when a new member or a pastor join a community of faith. Sometimes those life journeys diverge, when a death occurs, someone moves away, a relationship ends...or when a member or pastor leaves a community of faith.

Two years ago our paths converged when I became your pastor. Now, it seems, it is time for us to take different forks in the road and go our separate ways. None of us knows exactly where our paths will go from here, but *two things are certain*. Most of us, no matter how much longer the road is, will face more bumps and turns in that road, and we will find ourselves in more unexpected places. *Life just is that way*. The other certainty is this: *God will be with us every step of that winding way*. God is here with us today, in this mass of mixed emotions, and God will be here the next time we sneeze, the next time we celebrate a life or grieve a death, the next time we stumble literally or figuratively. Whatever we do next, be it large or small, God will be at the center of it. So, whatever we are feeling now or in the moments, hours, days, weeks, months, and years to come, let us call on God to give us strength, to bring us comfort, and to guide us to do the right things.

*Now let us pray.*