

## Monday's Comin'

Acts 2: 42-47; John 10: 1-10

"I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of." (John 10: 10, *The Message*) Monday's coming and real life is waiting for you and me. The gospel says Jesus came so that every person can have life "more and better ... than we ever dreamed of."

Today is Sunday and the church gathers to worship God, to learn and grow, and to reconnect with brothers and sisters. The gathers to share joy and also pain, to acknowledge grief and gain support from each other. It gathers to deepen relationships and to make new ones. But our gathering as church on Sunday is not an end in itself.

Preachers often proclaim that the grief of Good Friday is bearable because of the joy of Easter Sunday. "Don't lose heart because 'Sunday's comin'!" So, we continue to gather on Sunday to imagine and embrace, to live in the truth of an existence that is not yet fully among us - the reign of God. We celebrate a quality of life that is not yet visible. But we proclaim that truth each Sunday as we seek to live in its truth. We are a community gathered in the presence of the Eternal to sing God's praises and rejoice in the coming of God's justice and God's mercy, even while we experience human injustice and hatred in the world.

Sunday gives us a vision beyond the limited and challenging reality of our lives. Sunday raises our vision to see higher. Sunday points us to Monday's world of work, school, family, and life itself.

Monday's always coming. It is in Monday's world that the promise of Jesus will come true - "I came so they can have, real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of." It's like in the Old Testament,

Sarah and her husband Abraham plenty of hard knocks in their time, and there were plenty more of them still to come, but at that moment, when the angel told them they'd better start dipping into their old age pensions for cash to build a nursery, the reason they laughed was that it suddenly dawned on them that the wildest dreams they'd ever had hadn't been half wild enough." (Frederick Buechner, *Peculiar Treasures*)

We're doing Sunday stuff, church stuff. Sunday stuff is church stuff even when it doesn't happen on Sunday. You're here today because you think church stuff is important. It's enough of a priority to get out of bed and down here at 38<sup>th</sup> and Troost on a beautiful spring morning. Church stuff is important because it helps us know who we are, whose we are, and where we're going. Sunday stuff helps us image living in the realm of God. We affirm grace and clarify what is true for ourselves. And, how we do Sunday determines how we do Monday.

I'm guessing most of you have a life outside church stuff. Let's call it *Monday stuff*. Monday stuff is the "not-Church" stuff, in other words, the rest of our lives. It's important because we all have to make a living. Monday is also the place to put feet to our prayers and be signs of God's new creation to those outside congregation. Monday

is the place for sharing love and affirming God's presence in the marketplace. And, how we do Monday determines how we do Sunday.

Connecting Sunday to Monday is the key. Making the connections, individually and as a congregation, will make a big difference in our lives. We will do Sunday stuff with more integrity because it really affects the rest of our lives. There will be a greater sense of meaning and of joy in the rest of our lives because of the understanding we gain and the relationships we build on Sunday.

The early believers, as told in the book of Acts, devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayers." They witnessed "many wonders and signs done by the apostles." They were "together and had all things in common. They would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. Day by day, the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." (Acts 2: 42-47)

This is certainly an idealized description of the early Christians. they had problems, c. but what was compelling about their life together was their deep love for each other, their deep commitment to each other, and the openness with which they lived their faith - the openness with which they connected Sunday stuff to Monday stuff.

The same qualities are compelling about you - about this congregation . The commitment and deep love you have for each other, your willingness to be open in living your faith and in connecting Sunday to Monday is compelling. It will result in your growing up in your faith and in your growing by new members coming to join.

Being church is not always as simple as the description in Acts implies. The early church had lots of tensions, challenges, and even splits in their life together. Being church in an authentic way is no simple matter today either. The quality of life we will live as church and as individuals has a lot to do with how we connect Sunday stuff and Monday stuff.

I want you to hear deeper question: How shall we live life in the cycle of Sunday to Monday and back again so that we experience "more and better life than we ever dreamed of?" There is a b. simple answer, but it is still challenging. The answer is to live life Monday (and all the other days) with the values of Sunday. Sunday provides the meaning and context for Monday and Monday brings the real world to Sunday.

Now, I want you to hear a story. Richard Cohen was a young television reporter with a bright and promising career. He worked with Walter Cronkite and Dan Rather at CBS and with Bill Moyers at PBS. Then, at the age of twenty-five, he was stricken with multiple sclerosis. The onset of symptoms was severe. He lost much of his eyesight and his ability to walk was severely impaired. He struggled to persevere with his career goals, but working in television journalism proved to be almost impossible.

Richard experienced the loss of mobility, the diminishing of his independence, and ultimately the loss of his marriage. He struggled, first in denial, then in the harsh reality of living with MS. In his mid-thirties, he met and married Meredith Vieira. The

couple now have three children and Meredith's career (*The View*) in television is being very successful.

Around the age of fifty, Richard developed colo-rectal cancer. He underwent successful surgery and therapy, and continue with life. The cancer returned within a year. As you can imagine, he was not a happy person. There was more successful treatment followed by more loss of independence and more pain. His primary emotion became anger and he was not pleasant to be around. Though deeply loved by his family, they avoided being around him. The anger and bitterness, almost overwhelming, has now eased somewhat through his family's support and their sometimes uncomfortable honesty. Following are some excerpts from his book *Blindsided*.

Meredith said to him, "Sometimes you talk about being diminished. I am diminished, too. It would be wonderful if you could be an equal."

Richard reflects, "The statement is fair. We no longer are equals. That admission is offered with pain, even on paper." "The statement validates what I have long felt. My hands do not work. Meredith must button my cuffs, sometimes put the key in the lock and turn it. My eyes do not work. She must find the pencil I have dropped, measure the pancake mix. Wife to mother is a sad transition."

"The imbalance between Meredith and me, the widening gap in our self-confidence and self-esteem, was marked. [Her] career was exploding upward while I had realized that a conventional job, any regular work, was probably physically out of reach."

"It used to be so different. We had been equals, personally and professionally. We loved our lives. That began to change when I began to fall. ...That's when my strong self-esteem, my bulletproof shield, began to crack."

Recently, Richard has begun to make some peace with life.

"When I tuck my son into his bed at night, when he throws his arms around my neck and kisses me, he says quite simply, 'I love you, Daddy,' I know he has taken in more than my foibles and flaws on that day. Somewhere inside, buried or hidden away on some level, my entire family must understand that the real person is not in the sneakers, but in the soul."

"I believe I am a better person for the journey I have been forced to take for these many years. Multiple sclerosis and cancer have proved to be tools of personal growth. Let me be clear. I would trade sickness for, say, a used car anytime. Maybe, just maybe, I am a better parent. Disease adds dimension to a person, depth to the soul. In the end, that is not so bad."

Richard then shares the now familiar quotation, often attributed to Nelson Mandela because he used it in his inaugural address:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens....

And as we let our light shine, we unconsciously give other people

permission to do the same.

It is in the world of Monday stuff where our light can shine, where the transformation in Richard Cohen's life took place, and continues to take place. His is a journey through the valley of the shadow of death: through the loss of his dreams and into the rebirth of his life, through the decline of his physical body through a crippling and life-threatening disease to a discovery of a depth of life he might never have found otherwise. The language he uses is not religious, but the depth of its meaning is completely religious. It is the essence of religion.

The role of faith, of our Sunday stuff, is to provide the language, the larger context and meaning, for our transformational experiences. On Sunday, we proclaim that the elemental power of the universe, God designed life to be this way. Our task as human beings is to walk that pathway. As challenging as the experience of disease or disappointment is, there is a sense in which, as Richard Cohen suggests, disease and other great challenges can facilitate that transformation.

When Jesus, in John's gospel, suggests his purpose is to help us have "abundant life," this is what he means. The way Jesus shows us is the path of resurrection, new birth that moves through death. It is the way of one who tells us to take up our cross daily and follow.

Sunday's lesson is that there is much more to life than letting our fears shape how we live. Sunday teaches that each of us has unique gifts and potential. Each of us has unique opportunity, energy, time, giftedness, and resources to be all that we as people can be. Sunday teaches that what is ultimate in this universe, the truth we call God, gives life in all its fullness and desires each one of us to live it fully.

Sunday teaches that the Spirit calls each one of us along a pathway of living; calls us to be co-creators in the shaping of our own lives; b. calls us to engage in relationships and to make vocational choices. How we choose -- out of hope rather than fear, out of possibility rather than the need for safety, led from within rather than from forces outside ourselves -- how we make our life choices will make all the difference.

Have confidence in yourselves  
that you should think deep and big,  
that for God nothing is impossible,  
that the [hope] you feel within yourselves  
is where the Spirit is;  
there is freedom and real love dispels fear.

Courage means to put one's own heart into the practice.

(Raimundo Panikkar, *Letters to a Young Monk*)

In the letting go, in the stepping out, in becoming all we can be, then we will discover that "our wildest dreams were not half wild enough." We will experience "real and eternal life, more and better life than [we] ever dreamed of." Let it be so.