

SnowSunday 2016      Romans 8:18-19, 23, 26, 28, 31, 38-39

St. Marks United Methodist Church, Charleston, WV      January 24, 2016  
(the Sunday that Saint Marks was about the only church in the Valley open)

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the [children] of God. 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans too deep for words. 28 And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to God's purpose.

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In the 5th grade, my school did a play in which I had a supporting role. (My arch rival in throughout elementary school, junior high (as we used to call middle school today) and high school had the lead role.) My character's name was "Slump" and the program passed out to the audience identifying the characters said, "Slump, a country bumpkin played by Monty Brown."

I even had a solo to sing.

That's all I remember about the production. I don't remember the story line; I don't remember any of my lines; I don't remember anything else.

- 5th grade;
- rival had starring role;

- “Slump, the country bumpkin” and
- solo.

But, somehow, these decades later, I managed to have a dream recently about my portrayal of Slump, the country bumpkin. Only, this time, instead of an elementary school gymnasium stage, it was on a big sound set, with a live audience of what looked to be 5,000 and was being broadcast by one of the major television networks.

Now, you might think that such a thing would be pretty neat – being able to live out this role of yesteryear.

(Oh, yes! Did I forget to mention? All the characters were being portrayed by the same 5th grade actors, including my former arch rival, who is now a partner in a law firm in northern Virginia, specializing in corporate mergers and hostile takeovers.)

Pretty neat? Not so much. You see, as I mentioned at the beginning of this wee homily, I didn’t remember the plot of the play, any of my lines, let alone my cues, nor my solo. AND I had been busy doing this emergency “port in the storm” for homeless people in the midst of the blizzard of the decade, all of which prevented me from attending any of the practices or even of seeing a script.

(You may be wondering how this outdoor production with 10,000 live spectators took place in the midst of a blizzard of the decade ... dreams don’t take such things into account.)

So there I was, in a panic. I didn’t even know when I was supposed to go on stage, let alone what I was supposed to say. But, as dreams have these things, I was wearing blue jeans and a flannel shirt – and the one other part of my costume I remembered, a big floppy star hat (from where? Again, it’s a dream.)

There I was backstage wandering around asking anyone, everyone, for a copy of the script. Everyone was busy using theirs. And then some stage hand who would not share his script with me, shouted in a stage whisper, “Hey! Slump! Get over here, it’s time for your entrance.” And he fairly pushed me out onto the stage.

I stumbled from the push and ended up falling flat on my face on the stage floor, in front of 10,000 laughing mouths, and looking up into the grin of my arch rival from the days of 2nd grade.

What could I do?

Well? ...

The only thing you can do in a dream – I woke up in a cold sweat!

Now the crazy thing was that a part of me wanted to go back to that dream to see what happened. And another part of me smacked myself in the face and said, “Hey, bumpkin; it’s a dream. Don’t go back!”

But there are lots of times, outside of dreams, where some version of the same scenario gets played out. Here’s the basic story line. We are going along. Something happens. We fall down.

In dreams, we get to wake up and have a part of your semi-conscious self smack you in the face and say “**Wake up, bumpkin! It’s only a dream.**”

But in real life, when we fall down, what do we do?

There are lots of ways that we fall down. Every life has them, in their own personal variety. There are two ways that people – particularly people of faith – handle them:

(1) I am a screw up. I have let down my family, my friends, myself, my God. God gave me this script, and I have failed to read my lines that

God wrote for me. I have failed to be the person God intended me to be. And I am a sinner in the hand of an angry God.

(2) The other way that people of faith can look at this is: “I fall down, I get up.” God knows me and God loves me. God knew that I would fall, even when I didn’t. And there is NOTHING that will ever separate me from the love of God – not my screw-ups and falling down, and not anything. As you heard Janet read from the Epistle to the Romans: NOTHING will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord

I want you to join with me, reading responsively, in the first 18 verses of the 139th Psalm. It’s found beginning on page 854 in the hymnal. ....

- The God of the Sparrow, the God of the Whale
- The Holy, Holy, Holy One

God almighty wants nothing but the best for us. And God gives us freedom of choice. But this God also will write straight with crooked human lines. As we heard earlier from scripture: And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to God’s purpose.

This past week has not gone according to our plans.

- Who knew that Tent City would come down?
- Who knew that Saint Marks would be turned into a temporary “port in the storm” for the onset of the worst snow storm in over a decade?
- Who, among all those people who brought in food and supplies would be led to a spirit of generosity and sacrifice.
- Who knew that when the midnight shift for hospitality this morning – when preachers need to get their beauty sleep and most church

goers are doing the same – that the Atheists and Agnostics Group from the Kanawha Valley would step up and say, “Hey, we can help.”

- And then when the head of that organization had a huge snow barrier placed across his access to the highway (8 x 10 feet) preventing him from coming, who would know that his Methodist neighbor would come, with shovel in hand, and release him to do this work for God, about which he had no idea?
- When the pain that has come from this past week has aroused the spirits of so many people in this city and beyond, who knows what is going to happen because of it?

I don't know the answers to these questions, but I do know that we ALL fall down, and God helps us in strange and mysterious ways to get back up. NOTHING will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord

And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to God's purpose.

I also know this. There have been people these past four days who only knew one another by “descriptions”:

- homeless people and
- those church folks

There are often unpleasant stereotypes associated with BOTH those category names. But due to the circumstances of these past four days, we know one another by name and by face and by personal story. And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to God's purpose.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

