



From Pastor Zina Jacque

THE FURIOUS LONGING OF GOD A THOUGHT FOR THE SEASON OF LENT

Brennan Manning is an author, teacher and, though I have never met him, my friend. He has written many books but among my favorites is, The Furious Longing of God. For Manning, God's fury is not at all related to anger. Instead, he compares God's furious longing to a relentless, unyielding force that seeks until it finds the object of its search and then seeks some more until the object realizes all that is available for the asking. For Manning, God's love relentlessly seeks *us* and deeply desires for us to pay attention.

He opens the book, The Furious Longing of God, as follows:

*I'm Brennan. I'm an alcoholic.
How I got there, why I left there, why I went back, is the story of my life.
But it is not the whole story.*

*I'm Brennan. I'm a Catholic
How I got there, why I left there, why I went back, is also the story of my life.
But it is not the whole story.*

I'm Brennan. I was a priest, but am no longer a priest. I was a married man but am no longer a married man. How I got to those places, why I left those places, is the story of my life also.

*I'm Brennan. I'm a sinner, saved by grace.
That is the larger and more important story.
Only God, in His fury, knows the whole of it.*

In the book Manning also tells of a day when he awoke from a night of drinking curled up in the doorway of an abandoned building. He was filthy from living on the street and the prior night's activities had only added another layer of dirt to his body and clothes. As he looked up he realized a small boy was looking down at him. The child's mother rushed over to shield her little boy from such a wretched sight and as she pulled her son away she called Manning nothing but a pile of filth. Based on all the observable data, the woman was right. But Manning tells us, ". . . by sheer grace, the Jesus I met in the grounds of myself had furiously loved me regardless of my state of grace or disgrace. And why? [Because] his love is never, never, never based on our performance, never conditioned by our moods of elation or depression. The furious love of God knows no shadow of alteration or change. It is reliable, always tender."

I am laid bare by Manning's words. I am not what he was, but my own story (your story too) has fits and starts and episodes I do not want made public. How we got where we are, why we left, why we went back or did not go back, is just a part of our lives. But for those who believe in the unending, relentless, love of Christ, the whole of our stories is wrapped up in the God who comes to dwell with us; who stays beside us in doorways of abandoned buildings, four bedrooms houses in Barrington, or kneeling on the altar of our dreams or failures. Manning was right; God does love us furiously and deeply.

That is the love that was born on Christmas, that is the love that was nailed to a cross and that is the love that got up on Sunday morning and is available to us each day. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Lent: A Season of Reflection, Repentance and Relationship

Although our weather tells us it is still winter and spring is pretty far off, coming this month (on February 17th) the church begins a new season. The season of Lent marks a time of soul-searching and repentance. It is a season for reflection. During Lent we are given an opportunity to join fellow Christians, from the very earliest centuries of the church till now, in taking stock of our relationship with God and in reflecting on our individual walk of faith.

Lent originated in the very earliest days of the Church as a preparatory time before Easter, when the faithful rededicated themselves and converts were instructed in the faith as preparation for baptism. When modern Christians observe the forty days of Lent we imitate Jesus' withdrawal into the wilderness for forty days. We imitate his withdrawal so that we might remove ourselves from the everyday life we take for granted and focus on our God who is always present but sometimes easy to put on the backburner. Lent is a season that helps us to get away from all of our daily distractions and take time to do something new and out of the ordinary; to get away into our own "wilderness" for a while.

Many faithful Christians around the world enter this personal "wilderness" by giving up something for Lent (like chips or TV or driving their car). Others add something to their daily lives (like service, family dinners at the table, or prayer time). In changing the way they live, they are reminded of God in the everyday. When a bowl of chips is passed their way, they decide to not take a bite, remembering God in that moment. When their alarm goes off for an early morning prayer session, they awake knowing this is a special time to reconnect with God.

Giving up, adding to... it is all about a focus on our relationship with God. As we step away from the world and we make time for the development of a deeper, more recommitted relationship with God. We take time to rethink what God means to us and what we mean to God. And even though Lent helps us remember and relive Jesus' wilderness time we must remember we are not left alone in our longing for help; God meets us in the wilderness and walks alongside us.

This Lent, Community Church of Barrington will join the historical and worldwide communion of Christians as we walk into a time of reflection a time of wilderness. As a congregation, we hope that each member will commit **10 minutes a day to reflection, repentance, and deeper relationship with God**. Along with whatever you are giving up or adding to your daily life, we, as community will commit to 10 minutes of time just for relationship building with God.. Like any good friendship, marriage, or familial connection, our relationship with God deserves and needs time and presence to develop and grow. For Lent, we are honoring God, and ourselves, by taking this time to be fully present.

Starting February 14th, the Sunday before Ash Wednesday (the beginning of Lent) there will be resources available for children, adults and youth to help you in your reconnection and relationship with God. Devotions, prayer resources and ideas for each of the 40 days of Lent will be readily available for your family and you so that you might feel empowered, ready and excited to spend time with God. If you are unable to attend on February 14th, let the church office know and we will get you your Lenten resource so that you can begin your ten minutes (Just 10!) for God and you during our Lenten Wilderness.

This Lent, take some time to reflect, repent and build relationship with the God who, come Easter, we will know, gave everything and conquered everything to be in relationship with us!

In loving relationship,

Pastor Zina and Minister Ashley



ANNUAL MEETING EMBRACES THE FUTURE AT HISTORIC MEETING



Sunday, January 24, 2010 will always be identified as the day Community Church took a giant step for its future! Presaged by a delicious family style meal hosted by our own culinary magicians, Stu and Brenda Overby, and the desert provider group, fifty or so members and friends met to continue the growth of the unique fellowship we have on the corner of Lincoln and Grove.

The Council presented a 2010 budget that called for a Pastoral Associate to continue and expand Ashley's magnificent work with the children and youth, and their families. Ashley will be leaving at the end of this school year. The Assistant also would be staff to the Membership Development Committee. The Council had determined that this position was crucial to the continued development of the Youth Program, as well as the continued attraction of new Church members.

Early on the agenda was a report by Sandy Schroeder, Chair of the Long Range Planning Committee. This committee conducted several focus groups with the members and friends of the Church in 2009. These conversations identified several priorities for the Church. Highly prominent among them was the absolute need to continue Ashley's ministry with the children, youth and their parents.

This need had to be addressed in the 2010 budget. Our 2010 pledges were more in number and in total amount than in 2009, showing broad support of our ministries. However, the general increase in many expenses in 2010 and the anticipated cost of the right person to replace Ashley required expenses of \$274,635. Our expected income of \$227,160, left us with an operating deficit of \$47,475. The Council recommended that any such deficit actually incurred be paid from our Reserves. Bill Akerstrom reported the current amount of the reserves at approximately, \$112,000.

Our Constitution and By-Laws say that an Assistant Pastor is to be recommended by the Pastor to the Council. If the Council is in agreement, it will recommend that person to the Membership for its vote. Pastor Zina stated that she has several resumes already. She will be forming a committee to review these and assist her in her recommendation.

The Moderator reviewed the considerations of the Council in proposing the 2010 budget. The Council considered the great fellowship we have here and the need to spread it to other people. The growth in membership has occurred largely through the youth and children's programs. The presence and funding of the Pastoral Associate will need to continue for 24 to 36 months to see the full outcome of our plan. Additional pledges during this period could largely balance our budget. Fifteen new pledges of an average \$60 a week could do it.

Two great decisions were made by the Membership at the January 24th Meeting; first, to constructively plan for the future of our Congregation and the second, to use some of our available funds to bring about the change we desire. The call for the vote on the proposed 2010 budget, resulted in a unanimous "YES", without any "NO"s or abstentions.

So, here we go into the future of our ministry at the corner of Lincoln and Grove. God grant that our dreams and desires are liken to His will. God grant us all Peace and Grace.

Clarke Robinson, Moderator

LEARNING FROM OTHERS AS TRAVEL TOGETHER ALONG THE WAY



The following article is excerpted from the writings of Rev. Dr. Larry Greenfield. In this reflection he writes about the *purpose* of the church. After you read it there are some questions to ponder.

“CUSTOM”

I had myself pretty well persuaded that the churches claiming to follow in the patterns and practices of Jesus – and that covers almost all of them – were off-base by focusing their programmatic life on worship. As far as I could tell from reading the accounts in the Gospels, Jesus didn't spend a lot of time in synagogue. Most of the time he was outside and at a distance from those religious buildings doing things that we don't usually tally up as “worship” – things like healing sick people, restoring sight and hearing to the blind and deaf, teaching and telling stories to whomever would listen and arguing with self-righteous folks like the Pharisees, and generally breaking the conventions and customs of his cultic and civic culture.

All of that non-churchy kind of stuff was based, it seemed, on Jesus being persuaded that God was drawing near to usher in a new order for every dimension of life, in which all the established rules and regulations would be reversed and revised based on the law of love. It seemed clear to me that, somehow, not too long after Jesus had departed from his earthly life, the churches forgot what Jesus had really been up to and began insisting that being a real Christian had to do with showing up for worship. And that, through the ages, the churches that followed appeared not to be able to break that habit.

So it was disappointing, to say the least, to read again the familiar words from the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Luke – the part where Jesus, now back in Galilee after his temptation in the wilderness, quotes the prophesy of Isaiah about bringing good news to the poor, and release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, etc. – and realize that going to the synagogue on the Sabbath was his “custom.” When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, *as was his custom*. (Luke 4: 16)

Well, there went my thesis about a non-churchgoing Jesus! Until I reflected on the fact that “custom” has two quite different meanings. On the one hand – in keeping with what seems to be reported about Jesus in this passage – it has to do with following traditional practices – practices that are routine, almost habitual, and can be virtually law-like. But “custom” can also mean, at least in English, making or performing in a manner that is genuinely distinctive, or according to unique specifications – as in “custom made.” In this latter sense of “customizing” there is virtually “custom-breaking” going on.

Could that dual meaning for “custom” salvage my insight about the misplaced emphasis on worship as practiced by the church early-on, and then on and on over the centuries, and continuing on today?

Both of those meanings seem to operate in understandings of religion and the way faith communities and faith leaders operate: one conserving, maintaining, and preserving, and the other liberating, originating, transforming, and sometimes even disrupting what is well-in-place.

Yes, Jesus did follow the custom of attending the synagogue on the days of the Sabbath. But when he did so on that Sabbath day in Nazareth he broke the customary way of worshiping – of reading from and commenting on the scriptures in keeping with traditional interpretations – and he customized it all to his own specific and distinctive message. He announced that he – Jesus of Nazareth – was the recipient of the Holy Spirit, in keeping with his being anointed to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah.

That meant that “custom” was to be customized to a new reality in the immediate present – that the poor would no longer have to wait for some good news, that the captives would no longer have to wait for release, that the blind would no longer have to wait to recover their sight, that the oppressed would no longer have to wait to be free.

As the anointed one of God, empowered by the Spirit, he (Jesus) was in the business of making all this happen as the essential component of authentic faith and true religion.

Now “custom” itself would have to be recast in terms of this new understanding of what God is continually doing in the world: to follow this new custom one would have to join Jesus in proclaiming good news to the poor, and release to the captives, and the recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed, all as a sign of God’s favor with all of God’s people.

The place of worship? I stand corrected by the scriptures. It turns out that it is very important... but not central nor an end in itself. It is an instrument and a means to inspire and prepare the followers of Jesus to be about his anointed work, his anointed calling, his anointed ministry.

Yes, it’s true that the worshipping community there in Nazareth was outraged by the way Jesus had customized their custom of worship and turned it into something that would require them to reorient their whole understanding of authentic faith. In fact, they were fully prepared to hurl him off a cliff at Nazareth’s edge and leave him for dead. But that’s often what’s at stake in disrupting “custom” and customizing it to God’s end of a dynamic new community, a community where there should only be a custom of mutual care and mutual justice and mutual peace in a ever-changing world – or, in the language of this day, a Beloved Community.

PASTOR ZINA’S QUESTIONS

As we journey together, sharing ideas, debating, agreeing and stretching; we learn and grow. What follows are some questions that Rev. Greenfield’s article generated for me. Whether you agree with Rev. Greenfield or not, I hope this article and the questions pique your interest and start your juices flowing about the purpose/purposes of the church

When you think about the word church, what comes to mind?

What purpose does the church serve in your life?

What purpose does the church serve in the life of the community where it is located?

Given the state of our world in the first few days of the second decade of the 21st century, what purpose should the Christian Church serve in the world?

*P.S. The sermon on February 7th will focus on some of these questions.
If you have ideas you would like to share with Pastor Zina, feel free to pass them on.*



Birthdays and Anniversaries in February

February 2 Chris & Marjorie Kiefer Newman Anniversary

February 10 Leslie Lirgameris Birthday

February 12 Ellie Menso Birthday

February 14 Marge Boynton Birthday

February 14 Daniel Jahnke Birthday

February 19 Brianna Bibbings Birthday

February 22 Hailey Bulandr Birthday

February 23 Joyce Tardrew Birthday



The Story of St. Valentine

In 270 A.D., marriage had been outlawed by the emperor of Rome, Claudius II. Claudius issued this decree because he thought that married men made bad soldiers since they were reluctant to be torn away from their families in the case of war. Claudius had also outlawed Christianity in this time period because he wished to be praised as the one supreme god, the Emperor of Rome. Valentine was the bishop of Interamna during this period of oppression. Valentine thought that the decrees of Rome were wrong. He believed that people should be free to love God and to marry. Valentine invited the young couples of the area to come to him. When they came, Valentine secretly performed services of matrimony and united the couples.



Valentine was eventually caught and was brought before the emperor. The emperor saw that Valentine had conviction and drive that was unsurpassed among his men. Claudius tried and tried to persuade Valentine to leave Christianity and serve the Roman empire and the Roman gods. In exchange, Claudius would pardon him and make him one of his allies. St. Valentine held to his faith and did not renounce Christ. Because of this, the emperor sentenced him to a three-part execution. First, Valentine would be beaten, then stoned, and then finally, decapitated. Valentine died on February 14th, 270 A.D.

While in prison, waiting for his sentence to be carried out, Valentine fell in love with the jailer's daughter, the blind Asterius. During the course of Valentine's prison stay, a miracle occurred and Asterius regained her sight. Valentine sent her a final farewell note. He signed his last note, "From Your Valentine." Even today, this message remains as the motto for our Valentine's Day celebrations.



LEARNING TREK ACADEMY

We welcome Denise Tenyer! Learning Trek Academy is an academic enrichment program offering reading readiness classes for children ages three and older. The Academy offers six levels of early literacy curriculum and Kindergarten enrichment classes. Denise started her school in her home and the expansion of her student base presented a need for classroom space. Her cheerful classroom is located on the lower level next to the KEEP rooms.

CALENDAR PAGE

The Community Church of Barrington
407 S. Grove Avenue
Barrington IL 60010



Ladies Who Breakfast will meet on Wednesday February 24th at 7:30 a.m. at the Breadbasket Restaurant in Barrington. Have a delicious breakfast or just a cup of coffee while networking with the Ladies. A great way to start the day!



Wednesday, February 10th, at 6:00 p.m. is **Potluck**. Bring a dish to pass, your own dishware and an appetite for fellowship. Bring a friend.

Keep your ears open for a special daytime **Lenten Study**. Information will be forthcoming in our Thursday email Flash and upcoming bulletins.



Mark Your Calendar - **Wonderful Wednesday** are the first and third Wednesday of each Month. There are activities for children and youth. It's fun so join in and have a terrific evening. It starts at 6:30.

DID YOU MISS THE **ANNUAL MEETING**? IF YOU WOULD LIKE THE REPORT COMPILED BY THE COUNCIL, PLEASE LET US KNOW AND WE WILL MAIL YOU A COPY.