

Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:7-14; Phil 3:4b-14; Matt 21:33-46
Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost – Year A – Oct 8, 2017

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Trinity Episcopal Church

Miriam Therese Winter is a Medical Mission Sister, author, songwriter, professor at Hartford Seminary among many other things. She wrote a song years ago entitled “Joy is Like the Rain.” These are the words.

I saw raindrops on my window, Joy is like the rain.

Laughter runs across my pain, slips away and comes again.

Joy is like the rain.

I saw clouds upon a mountain, Joy is like a cloud.

Sometimes silver, sometimes gray, always sun not far away.

Joy is like a cloud.

I saw Christ in wind and thunder, Joy is tried by storm.

Christ asleep within my boat, whipped by wind, yet still afloat.

Joy is tried by storm.

I saw raindrops on the river, Joy is like the rain.

Bit by bit the river grows, till all at once it overflows.

Joy is like the rain.¹

This past week I had the joy of going to Bethany Beach, Delaware, for three days. At dinner the first night some sang this little song. The gathering was made possible by a friend who retired in January after a varied and rich career as a

¹ Words and music: Miriam Therese Winter, Medical Mission Sisters 1965.

midwife, teacher of midwifery and women's health in several African countries among other things. Instead of having a retirement party, she rented a 7-bedroom house right on the beach and invited friends, family, and colleagues to come whenever we could. People were coming and going (and still are), some reconnecting after many years of work together. Some knew each other and some did not. I met another Medical Mission Sister, Myrtle Keller, an OB/GYN doctor who served for many years in Malawi (running a clinic out of the back of her car) and later serving on the border of Mexico and New Mexico. Her lifelong mission has been providing women's medical care to the poor and to areas where medical care was scarce or nonexistent.

This short trip to the beach was packed with blessings. I met a number of people for the first time—physicians and PhDs whose lifelong work involved research for malaria, Ebola, and AIDS. One was a Peace Corps volunteer and now a Methodist minister. Their stories of serving in Malawi and other African countries were fascinating—how they supported one another in community, with medical care, with spiritual support, with babies being born, with ways they were changing the world by their knowledge and care for a people who needed their help desperately. I felt like a book was being unfolded at the table with the joy that was being shared—the joy of relationship. I believe the sharing of stories is essential to deepening relationships with one another and with God. I was blessed

by their stories and how God worked and continues to work through them.

The unspeakable Las Vegas tragedy happened the day before. As I drove from the airport the news was filled with people who had gathered in joy to hear country music and whose lives had been stripped away by tragic shooting. When will it end? When will these tragedies end? When will people stop hurting each other? Joy is like the rain. At the little beach retirement celebration, we didn't have the T.V. on at all. There was no newspaper, and yet the despicable loss of life was heavy on our hearts. After arriving home I read Frank Harris III in his Op-ed where he wrote disturbingly "...our nation has shown over and over again and again: We value guns over lives." Joy is tried by storm.

Paul in his letter to the Philippians says, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus." Paul writes to the people of Philippi from prison, and he begins his letter with these words, "I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now." (Phil 1:3-5). Before today's passage Paul talks about how to live a "gospel-worthy" life. In our passage Paul uses himself as an example and gives a personal testimony. He's not being arrogant and rather offering himself to teach others about the love of God in Jesus Christ and how he strives to live fully into the teachings of Jesus. His words are an invitation vs. a showing off.

Today little Gideon Travis Robinson will be baptized into Christ's fold at the 10 a.m. service. We'll all be reminded of the responsibility of that heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus about which Paul speaks. At our baptism we are given a call to action with very specific ways to live. Gideon's mom and his Godparents will make promises on his behalf, and we'll renew our own promises of baptism.

Paul uses personal testimony to teach those around him. Those friends I encountered at Bethany Beach were using personal testimony by sharing their stories—not bragging and yet sharing out of love in relationship. They were supported in community by those around them, just as we promise to support Gideon this morning and support one another in our own call to action. Paul's call to action is to know Christ and to be like Christ. That's what our baptism is all about.

Joy is like the rain...