



MUSINGS . . .

MEMORIES . . .

MEDITATIONS

Art Is Ageless

Sharon Christen



O R T H O S E W H O S E E B E

P.O. Box 627 Cabot, AR 72023 888.298.2020 www.horizonsstewardsl

For the past several years I have been writing and submitting some meditations to The Upper Room hoping any or all might be chosen for publication. Alas, only one is still being considered. However, I have enjoyed the process and during the Covid shut down it has been a somewhat useful activity.

Several of them were inspired by a conversation with a resident, a walk on the CCY grounds or perhaps an event planned by staff or resident.

You may recognize yourself or a friend or participated in the event I talked about. If so, I hope you are pleased. If not as Anne Lamott said in a TED TALK...."If people didn't want you to write about them they should have behaved better.

Enjoy!

My neighbor's eighty-two year old brother was visiting her in her new home and I had an opportunity to meet him. He had been a widower for about a year. He talked about his wife and about their courtship when they were both in their early twenties starting new jobs in different cities. He said that they were both introverts and they both had found it easier to talk about themselves in letters. On paper they had shared experiences, thoughts, feelings, expectations, and values – all those things that made them the persons they were. He had saved all those sixty-year old letters.

We continued to talk about the overwhelming grief when you lose your spouse. He and his wife had been so close. I have three dear friends all of whom had husbands die within this last year so I listened closely, hoping I could share some of his words of wisdom with them. He said "When the billows of grief threaten to overtake me, I go to that box of letters and read her words to me." His sister and I both said at the same time, "she is with you".

In today's scripture Jesus promises comfort to those who mourn. That is His promise to my neighbor's brother – and to us.

The lake was shrouded in fog this morning when I looked out my window. There were just a few dim lights shining from across the lake. I was thinking that for the walkers at our retirement community it will be difficult to see very far ahead on their morning jaunt. Then I remembered the scripture that tells us "now we see through a glass darkly but then face to face". I don't know about you but I often wish I could see what lies ahead. But in my saner moments I know that what is expected of me as a follower of Christ is to step confidently into that day and the next one and the next one knowing that I'm not walking alone. And in each of those days I am challenged by the words of a good friend. "As Christians, we are blessed to be blessings to others, not just to some others - not just to those we like – but to be blessings to all we meet.

April 9, 2020

I learned to knit the summer I was 15. That year I was working at a mountain resort and the cook, Emma, taught me how to knit and also taught me how to fry donuts and make a chili size. My first knitting project was to make a pair of argyle socks which I gave to my boyfriend. A simple scarf would have been easier.

I began knitting again in the spring of 2020 while we were sequestered during the Covid-19 pandemic. I made two caps and a scarf which can be given to homeless people next winter.

While I remembered most stitches, I would make mistakes and have to “unknit” to correct them. The imposed “sheltering-in-place” during the epidemic gave me time to think. I thought about how life is like knitting. It is a step by step (or stitch by stitch if you prefer) process. Sometimes we make mistakes and then we have to “unknit” and start again. But the God who loves us encourages us to think about our mistakes, to ask for forgiveness, to make amends if that’s possible and best of all to begin again on our faith journey trusting always in His presence and guidance. I believe we have a God who is in the forgiveness business and I am grateful.

Vacation Bible School was over. My friend and I had been co-chairs of the "Snack Committee". We had been challenged to provide daily snacks that were nutritious and went along with the theme, The Kingdom of God. We made castles out of graham crackers surrounded by moats of cheerios. The hit of the week had been the king's cupcakes studded with M& M jewels. We were exhausted – and exhilarated!

The next week I was having breakfast with a 90 plus year old resident in our senior community. She told about her first VBS. She and her single mom were living near a Methodist church on the south side of Chicago during the Depression. The Bible story was from Genesis. The hymn was "I Would Be True" (not "Jesus Loves Me" as I had thought). And the art activity was making a green clay relief map of the Garden of Eden. She talked about pinching off a small piece of clay, rolling it carefully into a ball and placing the coconut on the palm tree in the garden.

I was utterly amazed at the impact that VBS experience had on a little five year old girl. She had remembered the Bible story, the hymn and the art activity. This had been her introduction to church - and to faith - and to loving people who worked hard (and I'm sure prayerfully) to provide such a memorable experience for children, and especially my friend, so long ago.

I was sitting in the dining room with residents at our senior retirement center. It was close to Thanksgiving. We were talking about earlier holidays with family and friends and what our particular job had been in preparing the meal. It may have been making the pies – several flavors to accommodate the crowd. Or preparing the stuffing or dressing with corn bread or white bread depending on where you lived. Mine was making the cranberry sauce from fresh cranberries - although our kids always preferred the canned variety.

The worship and work of the church is like preparing a Thanksgiving meal. We all have gifts to share. And we all receive from others. In a worship service the preacher preaches, the choir sings, the reader shares scripture, the acolyte lights candles. During the week, pledges are mailed so bills can be paid. Homebound members pray for those who have asked for prayers during difficult times. Sunday school teachers prepare lessons and pray for their students. Men pick up loaves of day old bread from the grocery store and take them to a homeless shelter. The custodians make sure rooms are in readiness for meetings. And someone always makes sure the coffee is hot and the donuts are bought!

Whether it's the family or the church or faith community, the gift of each person is necessary to the whole body. With joy we share our gifts and with gratitude we receive the gifts of others.

While I was sitting on my couch reading *The Upper Room* something shiny caught my attention. A small pop up Christmas card on the bookshelf across the room showed Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus, two sheep and a dove. The figures were simple, almost childlike. But what caught my eye was the circle – or “nimbus” if you want to be theological – around Mary’s head. It was bright gold reflecting the light from my reading lamp.

We’ve just celebrated Epiphany, the Festival of Light. And during Christmas the world just seems to glow. Lights outline houses and walk ways, cover fir, pine and spruce trees seen through windows. And who is not moved seeing the light from hundreds of candles being held high as we sing the words to “Silent Night” on Christmas Eve.

We all need light at this darkest and coldest time of year. And we need to be light. As my Christmas card reflected the light, we need to be reflections of light in our dark worlds. As Matthew said “Let your light shine before others....”

Matthew 5:14-16 (NRSV)

A friend was telling me about a Christmas present she gives to her grandchildren. During the year she writes a story about one of their ancestors and she encourages them to put it into the archival box that she had given each of them several years before. This year she wrote about their great-great-grandfather who had come to Texas with his wife and two year old daughter in the late 1800's. He had to sell his gun so that he could buy a tent for them to live in that first winter.

Those of us that have grandchildren know that depending on their ages, personalities, and interests this may not be their favorite Christmas present! But, my friend hopes that through these stories they will feel a connection to the family members that have gone before them.

OUR family history is found in the Bible. When we read the stories of Sarah or Mary or Joseph or Peter, we know that these are our family members. They serve as role models for us in our daily living. They are our ancestors in faith, and we are connected to them through their stories.

This is the time of the year we experience the deluge of Christmas letters. I still like to get them. Sometimes my husband may even get organized and send one out. Of course, at this stage of life we hear about the outstanding accomplishments – academic, athletic, professional etc. – of grandchildren instead of children! And we still hear of the exotic places our friends have visited etc. etc.

For me this may be the one time during the year I have the opportunity of “talking with” a friend from my long ago past. Maybe that’s why it’s one of the reasons I like to receive them.....it provokes an opportunity to go back to an earlier more simple time of my life. Of course, it didn’t seem that way then.

One of our retirement facility residents set up a forest of Christmas trees in the lobby of the Overlook and asked us to write on a paper ornament and share a personal Christmas memory with our neighbors. Slowly the trees are filling up with dots of color and words about past Christmases – funny, sad, poignant, joyous, hopeful – you name it. We have lots of personal “Christmas stories” don’t we?

But the important story for each of us at this time of year is reflecting on THE CHRISTMAS STORY when God was incarnate - that is God became flesh and dwelt among us as a baby in a manger - and we once again sing joy to the world the Lord is come, let earth receive her king.