

**Sabbath Moments**  
**A Service of Healing and Wholeness**  
Sunday, March 15, 2009, 6 p.m.  
Southport Presbyterian Church  
The Toney Chapel

***When the Bad Thing has Happened...***

**In the same way the Spirit also joins to help in our weakness, because we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with unspoken groanings. And He who searches the hearts knows the Spirit's mind-set, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose.**

**(Romans 8:26-28)**

Now here I am in front of you, and you have your dreams too, or have had them. And I can tell you something. That mistaken injection that paralyzed my leg was not a stroke of bad luck. It was a grace.

Let's be precise. There's no point in pious platitudes. It was bad luck, yes. It was a misfortune. But God turned it into a grace. I had a useless leg. I could not climb. So I got a jeep and became a meteorologist. Through no wish of my own, there I was where I belonged: in the desert. Instead of trudging through the snow I trudded through the sand. Instead of mountain passes I came to know caravan routes. Instead of chamois I saw gazelles. Life suddenly appeared to me as it was, an immense personal exodus. Now I saw the desert as an extraordinary environment of silence and prayer.

My crippled leg helped me to "stand firm" (James 1:12).

I the runner – now stood firm.

I who'd always tried to do two things at once – now I stood firm.

No doubt about it, it was a plus. Deep down inside I began to understand that I hadn't been cheated. Misfortune had thrust me upon new paths. Brothers and sisters before me with your misfortunes, I testify to you of one thing only. Today, thirty years after the incident that paralyzed my leg, I don't say it wasn't a misfortune. I only say that God was able to transform it into grace.

(Carlo Carretto, talking to a group of handicapped people, recorded in *Why, O Lord?*)

**This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper... This is what the Lord says, "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious**

**promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity. (Jeremiah 29:4-14)**

There are times, though, when the impression of presence is not there, when it seems therefore God is not there. We go through something we didn't think God would allow, a testing of the heart, the kind of thing we pray against, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” Then it can seem we have encountered another side of God, a side turned away from us like the other side of the moon. If we hold to God nonetheless, we come to realize it is not another side of God we are experiencing so much as the essential ordeal of the journey with God. Every journey has its ordeal, according to storytelling, an ordeal by fire, by water, by sheer endurance, and a journey with God has its ordeal too, the ordeal of the human heart, the trial where the secrets of the heart are revealed. If I come upon that ordeal, I may find that my heart is divided, that it is not entirely with God. Still, I do not thereby fail the test. For I can bring my divided heart to God to be made whole. I can bring all my heart to God, although it is a heart in pieces, a broken heart.

(John S. Dunne, from *Loves' Mind*)

**“Because I love Zion, I will not keep still.  
Because my heart yearns for Jerusalem, I cannot remain silent.  
I will not stop praying for her until her righteousness shines like the dawn,  
And her salvation blazes like a burning torch.  
The nations will see your righteousness.  
World leaders will be blinded by your glory.  
And you will be given a new name, by the Lord's own mouth.  
The Lord will hold you in his hand for all to see –  
a splendid crown in the hand of God.**

(Isaiah 62:1-3)

**God be with you as you enter a new week.**