

Luke 22:1-13.

Now the festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them. They were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money. So he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present.

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. 8So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it.' They asked him, 'Where do you want us to make preparations for it?' 'Listen,' he said to them, 'when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters and say to the owner of the house, "The teacher asks you, "Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?" ' He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there.' So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

From the Ecstasy to the Laundry Rev. Charles Schuster November 4, 2007

John Ed Matheson is a United Methodist pastor, and he has written a book called *Treasures of the Transformed Life*, and in that book he tells a story about a company that had made the decision to switch over to a new insurance carrier. The only provision was that everybody in the company had to go along, and everybody did except for this one fellow who absolutely refused to. They had the supervisors talk to him and he wouldn't change his mind, and so finally the president of the company called him into his office, sat him down and said to him, "I understand that you're not willing to join with the others in this new insurance company. Is that correct?" And he said, "Yes, sir." "Why is it that you won't do that?" He said, "Because I don't want to." "Let me explain it to you this way," said his boss. "If you don't sign up, you're fired." The man walked out of the president's office. Everyone was watching. "Well, I signed up," he said. "We're all in this thing together." Somebody asked him, "Why did you change your mind?" He said, "You see that man in that office there? He explained this thing to me in ways I could understand."

I don't think there's anybody in the building today who's any more aware of the importance of this day than I, and I hope to explain it in ways we can all understand, because this is our Commitment Sunday, and it will determine the kind of church we will have, and the direction our ministry will take for years to come. And I think about what is at stake here, and what comes to me is the hope, and I think, realized hope – I guess we'll see – that the congregation as a whole has begun to realize what an alive, active, vibrant place this is. That the congregation appreciates the direction that the music program has taken, and the excitement of worship that's in our church, and understands that we can do more than we've done, that there are exciting things out there for us. The 12:15 service provides an opportunity to do experimentation such as the drama that you heard, and some of that we can bring into the other services, and that's exciting. I know that another thing's at stake, you're hoping our congregation realizes the

importance of our effort to try and start the new United Methodist Church in Wellington, and they're doing very well. They're getting young people to come in, it's exciting, what's happening. And that's part of who we are, and that when they need support from us that we're prepared to give it.

I think that there's the realization that our adult program classes have virtually grown in such a way that we're offering classes like we never have before in a coordinated effort, and the possibility of keeping that moving in such a way that we bring in some of the best teachers in the area, some of the most exciting thinkers in the whole country and around the world, and where we go from here with our adult program can be so exciting. And I'm hoping that people realize that what we've come to understand as our outreach ministry, which began with our initiative to Angola, the support there, the Guatemalan work team that just got back and we had this wonderful dinner a week or so ago, all the activities that have gone with our support for Habitat for Humanity, which is a hand up, not a hand-out, and all the possibilities that we've done and the ability that we have as a church to know that there's a difference when we start as a religious organization dealing with the causes of poverty and not just the symptoms. An excitement for the Children's Ministry here in the church. My goodness, two weeks ago Children's Sabbath, and how in the 9:15 service, some of you weren't here for that, but they came up, there must have been a million of them all over the place. It was an infestation of little children and we gave them all balloons, and then we asked them to let go of their balloons and they went up into the ceiling. There's a yellow one right over there, still there. And then we watched as every year we do this, we watched to see what kind of shape they would take as they rose. Sometimes we've seen those balloons form in the shape of various things, a ship one time. This year it was obviously the shape of a cross. How exciting that was. And to be able to keep that going by adding to our children's church school educational program a class for fifth and sixth graders, to be able to do that. And our Youth Ministry, so they can build an area in their church the way they want it, so it can be theirs. And our ministry to college students, so we can keep that going, and how exciting that is, and what a contribution. I mean, just look at our choir, how many college students are in our choir. College students are teaching in our classes, they're coming to our classes, and what they've added. The new van with the lift, and the old van, and all the wonderful people who get to ride in the van. All the wonderful things that we're doing, you just like to think the congregation is aware of that, and responds to that.

This is an important Sunday because it determines not just where we've been, that we're satisfied with that, it determines where we're headed and we're enthusiastic about that. The more excitement there is in the church, the more we support it, because we believe in it. And I must tell you that there's something in my soul that wants to hype all of this, to hype the faith. I'm inclined to want to do that. You may remember the first year I was here, thanks to Joe Winsett, we brought in the eagle. Remember the eagle we brought in? We sang "On Eagle's Wings" and we couldn't take an eagle into the little chapel because they jump forward and they might attack a church member, so we brought a hawk into the little chapel that Sunday morning and then the hawk kind of got down and got I think a sinister kind of – it was lost, I think, looking at Karen, and it really kind of scared me, the hawk in the chapel that day. It was not wholesome. Do you remember last year when we brought the alpacas, remember, everybody stand real still because they're kind of jumpy and they might rear up and kick somebody? We brought them in the door,

remember how they came in the door and then they strutted out the center aisle of the sanctuary? Was that exciting? Yes. It was exciting.

This year, I had a dream. I wanted to stretch a cable from the very top up there that would come down into where the organ was where Karen is sitting now, a cable, and since we're thinking about "ministry out of the box", what was going to happen, we were going to have a great big box coming on this cable, it was going to slide down all the way – spectacular. All the way down, and when it got to about where the piano is, we had some low-grade explosives worked out, with mousetraps, and a lid was going to fly open, and then this banner was going to pop up and go up into the ceiling, suspended on those pipes. But we knew that might be a mistake. So we settled for less, and this is what's over here, if you can see it. The lights might be such that you can't see it. But there's a degree of hype that goes with our faith that's important.

I'm reminded of the story, and I don't know where I read it, I just came across it this past week, of the two little boys in New York City. One of them was going off to the synagogue, and the other one was going to St. Patrick's Cathedral, both of them going to worship in different places, and the little boy going to the synagogue with kosher assurance said to the other little boy, "You know, of course, do you not, that Jesus is of my faith, that Jesus was Jewish?" And the other little boy, with that same kind of assurance, looked at his friend and said, "Yes, I understand that – but you understand, don't you, that his mother was Catholic?" Jewish faith has all kinds of hype. They have the Holy of Holies, where only the rabbis go. They have that sacred scroll of the Torah, the law that they read every week. They know how to do hype. And the Roman Catholics, they know how to do hype, my goodness, no one better than they, with the incense and the priests and the beautiful liturgies. They know how to do hype. It's spectacular, the hype.

United Methodists, we have pot-luck dinners, and that's hype. And we have Communion the first Sunday of every month, and we remember those words of Jesus and how he said, "This is my body, broken for you, take and eat." And how he took the cup and he lifted it and he said, "This cup is the New Covenant in my blood, shed for your sins. Drink this and be thankful." Our faith has always been hyped. We're told there were angels in the clouds, singing, the day Jesus was born, singing "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to all people." Paul experienced the hype of the conversion experience on the way to Damascus when he was blinded by the light. Here, on Christmas Eve, we know about hype on Christmas Eve. We turn out all the lights and pass out the little candles and sing "Silent Night." I still think we could do this with cell phones, but that doesn't meet with anybody's approval. And then we read the Christmas story, and at the end of the Christmas story we've all brought in our bells, and we ring our bells. You may remember the year that one of the ministers forgot to tell the congregation to ring their bells and we almost had to fire him. And then we had this thing on Maundy Thursday that we did, that we'd done before, you know, where the choir is singing about the death of Jesus on the cross, and then we find some idiot, some fool, to take a spike and pound it into an old rugged cross. The results aren't always so good when that happens, you know what I'm saying? And then on Easter, we bring in this cross and put flowers on it while we're singing "Christ the Lord is Risen Today." I mean, we know about hype. Blow up balloons on Children's Sabbath and have them released into the sanctuary. We fill the sanctuary with people to hear about the mountain climber who climbed Mt. Everest, and we fill the sanctuary with a retired Methodist minister who was there when they liberated Nordhausen, and spoke of the Holocaust. And next

Wednesday we're going to fill the sanctuary, I'm sure, with the NFL official who will talk about sports and values and that sort of thing.

There are moments like that in our lives. It's the hype of our faith. Some time, maybe at a campfire, you heard the voice of God calling for you, and you began to realize that when God calls you, it isn't because you're singled out for privilege, it's because God is saying to you, "Look, we got work for you go do – get busy, go out there and do it." That's what that is. It's the hype of faith. Maybe for some of us, it's the day you joined the church. Or maybe it was the first time you had communion, you came up front and had communion. Maybe it was the day you realized that the doubts you had were doubts you could express, because other people had those same doubts, as well as some of the same affirmations, that the church was a place where you could express yourself. The hype of faith will get us here, it will keep us open to something dynamic, and I'm not above using gimmicks to do that. I want to get your attention. It's an important Sunday, on Commitment Sunday, as we come to the table, as we make our promise of support for the church. The more we hype our faith, the more we will support it. The more we receive from the church, the more we will give to it. But the fact is, it really, in terms of faith and the full extent of it, doesn't work this way. Most of the time, it isn't the hype of our faith that holds us, it's the hum. The hum of the faith is something we rarely see or hear.

I've read that story that we heard this morning from the Gospel of Luke, about the setting up of the Last Supper, I don't know how many times, and frankly I never saw this before, but I've seen it now. The Last Supper would never have been told, and maybe would never have happened, had there not been man worried about his laundry. Jesus said to his disciples, "I want you to go into the village, and you're going to find somebody carrying a bucket of water, about noon." What do you think he was doing with that water? I think he was washing his dishes or his laundry. Jesus knew he'd be there every noon, about that time. "Go in there and ask him if we can use his upper room." And they did. He was doing his laundry. After the ecstasy, the laundry. Most of our faith is a hum, not a hype.

Jim Harnish is a United Methodist pastor in Florida, and he's written an Advent book, and I got it and read it, and he tells the story about one of the Christmas celebrations, and members of his family came for a visit, and they ran out of beds. So three-year-old little Julia chose to sleep on an air mattress at the foot of the grandparents' bed. It was in the middle of the night little Julia got up and crawled into bed with her grandparents, and Jim looked at her and said, "Listen, we can't wake up until the sun comes through the window." He closed his eyes as if to go back to sleep, hoping that she would do the same, and in a little bit she hit him on the shoulder and said to him, "Grandpa, don't you know you can't see the sunlight through the window with your eyes closed?" And she's right. That's right. We've got to pay attention to the way faith comes to us in the hum, not the hype, or we'll miss it.

Pearl Bailey said, "People see God everywhere, every day. They just don't recognize it." There's a woman whose name is Sarah Cannon. Anybody know who Sarah Cannon is? Sarah Cannon is famous. She was old, actually she was dying. She wanted to talk, and a friend, Amy, came by. Sarah said to her, "You know the color that artists most like is the color black. It's not a color but it's a contrast. If you have black, you can put any color beside it, and that would allow for the sense of depth. In fact, you paint something and you put black in there, and you can paint it in

such a way that it looks like it's even going to come alive, and you can reach out and touch it.." The old woman is famous, but we don't know her as Sarah Cannon. She was not famous for being a deep thinker. She was famous for the hat she wore. For the hat that always had the price tag, Minnie Pearl. Sarah Cannon. Hayseed, hillbilly, so wise. And the young woman Amy was famous too. She named her first child Sarah Cannon. Amy wrote a book, and this is where I got the story – *Mosaic Pieces of My Life So Far*, and in the book she wrote about her meeting with Minnie Pearl. It read about the darkest times, about the days that are bleak and black, how they add depth to all the other experiences, how they add contrast and shadows and how they give beauty to the whole. Amy is famous as well, she's not known as a writer so much, she's known as a singer, Amy Grant. And she concludes by saying, "Many days pass in semi-awareness, in a kind of oblivion. Some days are crowded with distractions and other with sweet hours of peace and beauty. Whatever they hold, I don't want to miss a thing."

That's when our faith helps, I think, the most, but it's least dramatic. It's the hum of faith. It's the quiet that fills our time. The hum of faith is there when we're waiting for a verdict, or we're waiting for a diagnosis, and we're not sure what will come to us or how we will deal with it, and yet somehow we hear the voice say to us, "Have faith, I am with you. Whatever will be, I'm there." The hum of faith penetrates the stillness when we find ourselves raking leaves in the wind, or running in circles and getting nowhere. The hum of faith, somehow it's a book we've read or a sermon we've heard or a hymn we've sung or an anthem that's been sung in our church. It's says, "God has a job for you to do, and though it may seem that you're running in circles job you have to do is important, what you're doing is more important than you know." The hum of faith intercepts our thoughts when we begin to notice how evil deeds seem to prosper and good does not prevail. Somewhere in the Bible, perhaps in one of the prophets or a piece on the Sermon on the Mount, the hum of faith reminds us that truth does prevail and the meek will inherit the earth. It was what Sydney Poitier meant when he said that the purpose of life is to find enough courage to face our ends with character. It's when we carry water, and we're doing the laundry, and all of a sudden realize there are more important horizons this leads to, such as the upper room and communion. It's baking a cake for a pot-luck dinner and realizing that we're helping create a community event in which important ideas are going to be expressed, and important consequences will be realized. It's putting our pledge in the little box on either side. Maybe we think our pledge is too small to be of consequence, until we stop and realize that it may be that particular pledge that pushes our church to do some of the things that we would never have been able to think about doing because of that gift. That's the hum of faith. It recognizes every part as part of the whole and sees every act as important and every moment as sacred. If I could somehow get it said so we'd all understand, it would sound like this. Our church has the hype of faith. We do big things, and we do them pretty well. It's the reason we invite others to join us, and it's the reason they come. It's the reason that for the last three years, our church membership has grown in numbers. And our church understands the hum of faith. That is the quiet way we support each other, the subtle way we are fed and nourished, in so many ways, ever time we enter the doors into these buildings. But this is an important day. As we make our pledge in the support of the church for the coming year, this will determine what kind of box we can build, and it will enable us to see how far our ministry is able to break out of it.

Let us pray. Oh God, we offer this day ourselves, our gifts, our service, our prayers, our presence, as we are reminded of our promise to the church when we joined it. Be with us as we

come to the table, and may we know that you are present to us, to give us strength to do what you would have us do, and courage when we become afraid to do it. This we pray in Christ's name. Amen.