

Will you pray with me? May the words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

That prayer, spoken by many preachers before their sermons is so beautiful, and so familiar. In Friday's Daily Devotional, Rev. John Edgerton of The Old South Church in Boston wrote about this verse from psalm 19. He says "ultimately the task of preaching is beyond my power....I don't mean to burst anyone's bubble, but I am every bit as flummoxed by the meaning of the Bible as anyone. I am every bit as hungry for the good news as anyone. I get up and preach, not because I have all the answers, but because I am looking for them".

I think that it must sometimes be challenging to remain humble as a preacher, as one who is often looked to for answers for really big questions. But hard isn't bad. Hard is courageous. Hard is brave.

By now, I'm guessing many of you have read, watched, or listened to the Rev. Mariann Budde's sermon from National prayer service at the National Cathedral on Tuesday. If you haven't, I think you should. It was a beautifully written and spoken courageous plea for unity in our country and our world.

She centered her message around the core values of respecting the dignity of all people, being honest, and acting with humility. Core values that have unfortunately become, in this political climate, actions that require courage. But perhaps the bravest part of it was her last paragraph, a final plea in which she gently urged our president to have mercy on those in our country who are scared, specifically suggesting mercy for groups of individuals that have been targeted by the president. This woman of faith stood up and oh so gently suggested that unity despite our differences is crucial. What a beacon of light. What a message of hope.

This week was a miserable week.

In addition to fearing for our democracy, and all the concerns arising post-inauguration, last Sunday evening I threw out my back. It was so silly, I was just kneeling on the floor building a fire in the woodstove, and pop. Suddenly a pain like no other and there I was, on the ground, unable to get up for several hours. I think sometimes God just has to tell you somehow to slow right down! And then, Molly tested positive for Covid (don't worry, the rest of us tested negative just before coming here this morning). And then - yes, there's another one - Finnegan fell snowboarding and broke his

tailbone. So far Joey seems ok - other than having to do everything for the rest of us of us all week long. There was no better physical lesson for me that mirrored our reading from 1 Corinthians about all the parts of the body working together than for me to be immobile from one part, albeit a very crucial muscular-skeletal part, not functioning. And, I know exactly why it wasn't working. Because I haven't been strengthening my core muscles that were weakened a year ago when I had surgery. Instead, I was allowing those parts to remain weak, and relying on the stronger parts to carry me. Until they couldn't. And now, I have to work harder to build the strength back up, in the midst of pain, when it could have been done more easily over the last year, with all of this pain avoided. But you know what they say about hindsight. Through all of this pain and discomfort and upheaval in our home, there remained a spark of light and love - one that had Finnegan making jokes through his pain and making me laugh so hard that I cried.

By a show of hands, how many people here today made a New Year's Resolution this year?

Typically, it seems that New Year's Resolutions are about making something better that we don't like about ourselves. Usually, resolutions are a way to try to promise ourselves that we will do better at something, but

eventually we break that promise and end up feeling bad about it. How many people who made resolutions this year made theirs about doing more of something that they are proud of about themselves?

I often read various devotionals, articles, blogs, etc. that inspire me. One of these, sent at the beginning of January by Liz Gumbinner who writes *I'm Walking Here*, was about how instead of making resolutions, why don't we list 10 things from 2024 that we enjoyed, were proud of, or want to do more of in 2025?

How can we pour our hearts, our hopes, into something that brings us joy? Can we offer our hearts, hopes, and joy to others through the things that we do well that we are proud of? As the poet Mary Oliver wrote: "Joy is not meant to be a crumb". What are you proud of? What do you do well? What are you enjoying that you'd like to enjoy more of this year? In thinking of ourselves in this way, with value, with positivity, and aiming to bring more of that forward in our lives and in our communities we can ourselves be a beacon of light.

Our reading this morning from Paul's letter to the Corinthians was describing how different gifts, different people, different lives, different perspectives all put together into one congregation are what makes us great. We each bring experience and wisdom that are vital to the fabric of this church. Even the newest members. Even the youngest children. It is our job to celebrate those differences, the unique perspectives, the wisdom of those who have carried this congregation through decades, the clarity of those seeing it for the first time, and our job to bring it all together to make it a richer place. We all belong here together. This year, let's bring light and hope here to this community to make it a richer place. We might not always fit together easily, sometimes there will be conflict. But if we did fit together seamlessly, then our tapestry would be pretty bland. We need the brighter colors to shoot through the sturdy background, we need new textures to emerge, so that when we stand back and look, suddenly the entire vibrant picture can be seen. And how beautiful it is.