



## LESSONS for LIFE

MAY 3, 2009 11:00 a.m.

BOOK TWO: WHEN THE HEART WAITS

Rev. Jo Bell

### SACRED READINGS

**Lesson:**       **ISAIAH 40: 28 – 31** (from *The Messenger*)

**Gospel:**       **SELECTIONS from “WHEN THE HEART WAITS” by Sue Monk Kidd**

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Good Morning MCC Toronto – it is so good to be with you again in the morning. And yes, I know I should begin by explaining why the title of my sermon is “Book Two: *When the Heart Waits*.”

Well, while on vacation with some friends earlier in the year we found that while we were away we were reading and reading and reading – sitting on the porch in the sun, cuddled up on the couch - wherever we were, we were all reading! As the time went on, I became deeply aware of how much I enjoyed taking the time to read a good book; new ideas or old ideas spun a new way. As we all read, the books offered so many conversations between us and we realized that the other 51 weeks of the year didn't often contain as much time for great reading. So, as the goal-oriented and task person you know me I said, how can I read more – except on vacation? And so I realized if I thought about YOU I would have an answer, because I bet you enjoy reading too. I believe that so many of us would love more time for that, and so I thought - what about if in the evening services where I preach more had a 2009 extended sermon series all about books? I'd be forced to read the book because it would be the right thing to do before preaching on it, (laughter) and, done right – if the sermon left you wanting a little bit more there'd be resources for you, so I thought it was quite a win-win. And then, when I was asked to preach in the morning, I thought to myself, why should I change my plan just because I have to get up earlier to preach?

So: book two. For that and for many other reasons I invite you into the wisdom, the thoughtful spiritual pages of the book called *When the Heart Waits* by Sue Monk Kidd. The sub-title of the book is *Spiritual Direction for Life's Sacred Questions* and the book follows the author through her life – at midlife – when she discovers the power of “waiting” and she calls it, “the missing link” in Human Spiritual Transformation.

On a cold February morning Sue Monk Kidd woke up to find herself “standing on the shifting ground of midlife” and she felt summoned to an inner transformation. She was being called from being one person to growing into someone else and out of a soul-searching walk to nowhere, she spotted a chrysalis, a butterfly cocoon, which is entered into by a caterpillar – a creature whose DNA calls it to enter into this darkness, this proscribed time of waiting – and of indescribable transformation. Green and wee the caterpillar crawls in – and then – coloured beyond robes of Samuel – she flies out, out of this dark, waiting place. Now the Gospels also have Jesus going into a time of darkness and yet in the tomb another indescribable transformation occurs when Jesus of Nazareth goes in and Jesus the Christ emerges.

So in Sacred Story and in front of our very eyes we see the model of entering a dark place, a time of waiting – of trusting the wait and emerging different and “more” on the other side.



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Now the tension in her book, and certainly in my life, is that I want Spiritual Transformation NOW.

- I don't have time to incubate!
- I don't have time to "live the question" and spend time in uncertainty!
- I don't have time to use all the letters in a word when I TEXT you
- And I certainly don't have time to WAIT on the MICROWAVE!

I am actually so impatient that many, many years ago – and I always preface this by saying, "Back then, when I was a young, foolish Marine, on a drunken night out in Thailand" I had the Chinese symbol for PATIENCE tattooed on my ankle. True story. Truth be told, in the waiting and soul-searching I've done over the last year – I wonder if I should trade the "young drunken Marine" story for one of awe and wonder at remembering an early, precious moment in my life when I followed the Wisdom of Holy Spirit as she invited me – and knowing my DNA inscribed impatience – to get that tattoo. I love that tattoo – and not just because it's on a place of my body that will not sag as I age! (much laughter).

2008 started out great for me, it really did. I was loving creating the Adult Spiritual Education Programme here and watching it really take off and stand on its own. I was in conversation with my CLM colleagues and we were taking CLM international. We had "Train the Trainers" scheduled in Europe and in Hawaii with folks from Australia and New Zealand scheduled for the Hawaii Training and so CLM was going to bounce across oceans and continents. My consulting business was doing fine, as I've built it up for over ten years now and it was coming into its own as well. Cheryl and I were watching our daughter grow into quite the strong, young woman that she is becoming – with a call to ministry fuelled by her vision of a Youth Outreach trip to the Dominican Republic. So at the beginning of the year everything in our lives seemed healthy, happy and hopeful; and then about March timeframe I began to have headaches: unexplainable, constant headaches and no medication we could find was touching the pain – and we tried many! So, without going into a lot of detail, it's simply hard to travel as I do and do what I do leading teams of facilitators in classrooms for week long sessions or leading a classroom full of people and talking in my "outside voice" when it hurts to be inside my head. We tried everything to diagnose the headaches and of course people with good intent came out of the walls and the woodwork – all with a cause and a cure. I went through innumerable numbers of tests and theories and neurologists and finally, through a member of our congregation to whom I am forever indebted, I found a doctor who was willing to "quarterback" the investigation of what was causing the headaches – so I could stop being a "CSI Investigator assigned to my own case," and I could become the patient, learning how to deal with the pain, the process and the constant waiting for yet one more test result. Along the way I had to severely adjust my life and my expectations of myself and my life – and trust the process – as I came to intimately understand the intricacies of our beautiful Canadian Medical System.

As the days ran into weeks and the weeks into months...some days it was all I could do to get up and be seen by those who needed to see me so no one would know anything was wrong. And now, as I look back on 2008, at some point I became less of a resister and fighter of the process and stopped fighting the process and I really believe it was fuelled by my "chance" reading of Sue Monk Kidd's book *When the Heart Waits*. I began to simply accept that I simply couldn't do what I once could do – and that my cognitive capacity was simply, for a time, impaired.

And for those of us who live in our head and who "do" better than "be" – the diminished cognitive capacity led to a diminished emotional capacity – and I found myself relatively unable to respond in a



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balanced way to stressful or negative stimuli. I was sad and I was frustrated. I was lost – and I couldn't fix it. And yet, just a few weeks ago in our Lenten Sermon series I listened to Mark Richardson preach the "PM Version" of the "Lost to Found" sermon and Mark said something that just made a great deal of 2008 more clear to me. He said that the only reason anything is lost is because we're looking for it where it is not. Let me say that again: **Something is LOST only because those who are looking for it are looking for it WHERE IT IS NOT, instead of WHERE IT IS.** The difficulty is that many of us look for that "lost" thing where it normally is, where it usually is, and if it's not there – then what? Lost – be in thing, be itself, be it God. And that was what the story was with Sue Monk Kidd in her book. While she was being called to becoming something new – which may truly be just more of becoming more of our true selves she was looking back to where she'd always been to find her right footing – but she was no longer there. She could not, with any true integrity, go back to where she'd been – just to be found.

**I know many of you know what I'm talking about. When you're pulled to something new – in the midst of that growth and change and transformation there is often pain, frustration, discomfort, confusion and fear and it is sooo tempting to want to just go back, even if going back isn't a great fit any more. And for many of us we have loved ones – friends and family who want us to just "snap out of it" and "come back and be the one you were to me," because often times who we were then served them, and they don't want to lose that. So sometimes we give in to their requests, to our struggle and we return. And that's why I think God gave the butterfly such huge beautiful wings...because there's no way that the butterfly, with those huge wings attached to its body could ever crawl back into that cocoon. No way.** And I also know that the butterfly doesn't just quickly crawl out of the chrysalis, shed it and immediately leap into the sky and fly. No – the butterfly must sit for a time and wait. The wings must dry and then something they don't even understand happens in their body: fluid must be pumped into the wings so they "inflate" and when the butterfly is ready to fly – with perfect faith – it does. So maybe we could look to that in our lives when we face major changes and shifting sand; and instead of rushing into the beautiful butterfly flying stage might we actually intentionally engage the waiting, the darkness, the quiet transformation promised by the chrysalis – if we just commit to staying there and trusting it – for as long as it takes.

Carl Jung, the renowned Swiss psychologist as well as 14<sup>th</sup> century German Theologian Meister Eckhart and 12<sup>th</sup> century doctor, scientist, writer, theologian Saint Hildegard of Bingen all agree that the foremost drive within a human is toward wholeness and realization of the SELF – not the ego, but the Self, the capital S Self, the true God-Self, the God image that is stamped on each of us "at our beginning."

Many theologians would say that was what Jesus was talking about in the Gospel of Luke when he said the "Dominion of God" is "within you and among you." There is a "Dominion of God that is within us," a Self that is already within us; an imprint of wholeness and divinity that is full and true – and yet our journey toward consciousness and to seek WITHIN to find this wholeness – is not often the journey our culture rewards us for.

Actually, in the fast, impatient life so many of us lead, and are constantly asked to lead – asking that question of how one might slow and pause and seek within has no easy answer and many of us just don't even take up the question unless we are facing or find ourselves standing on shifting sand. Like Dorothy holding Toto in her arms as her house is taken up in the cyclone and then is put down in a far, far away land unknown to her and like the Hebrew Exodus – when they were asked to leave the relative



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comfort and safety of Egypt for the wilderness and a promise that if they would go and trust God and walk for 40 years they would find a promised land – flowing with milk and honey.

And I'm going to risk in this moment that many of us don't need a cyclone, or slavery or some kind of oppression to find ourselves on shifting sand:

- \* job loss
- \* relationship loss
- \* loss of a family member or a loved one
- \* loss of health
- \* loss of a dream...loss of whatever...

Sometimes that loss, that shifting sand, invites us into a time of questioning and unknowing that if entered into with deep conviction to BE WITH that pain rather than to RUSH THROUGH that pain it can allow us to emerge differently on the other side – maybe with butterfly wings – maybe just one step closer to the Divinity that is our original imprint.

As I finish today I want to share a story. In 1992 I had a precious, precious little Pitbull named Puller. He was a loyal companion for ten years. I had recently left the US Marine Corps and had moved from California to Chicago and shortly thereafter he became quite ill instantly. I was alone that night and as I drove him to the emergency vet, as he couldn't stand on his own, I'll never forget that night in all my life. On the drive I had quite a talk with God. I knew that Puller was the only real link I had with a very defined life that I knew and understood as a Marine. And I knew that I deeply loved this dog. The emergency vet did her thing and said, "I can put him down now or you can take him home with you and he will die with you tonight or he may make it through the night and you can take him to his vet who could put him down in the morning where he'll feel more comfortable."

I chose the latter and carried my very gay little pitbull – my companion of ten years – home with me. There's a whole other sermon I have to write someday about a growing up love, as I stayed with him that whole night and how my love changed from the selfish "stay with me" love to the deep love that said, "go and be at peace." As I sat up all night with that dog's laboured breathing, I knew that night was a defining moment for me. Puller linked me to who I'd been – and was my only true tie left to that wonderfully defined life. If I lost him I felt I'd lose that link to who I'd been.

And in that dark night of my soul I also heard God's promise that when Puller passed I could FULLY CHOOSE the life ahead of me – unencumbered by the life that I had led. And yet, even in my understanding, I was so very angry! I said, "Why do such great lessons always have to come from such great pain?" I made up my mind that night that I wanted ALL of it. I didn't want a partial lesson here with a lot of pain sort of a lesson. I wanted all of it. I wanted to feel all of it and be with all of it and contain all of it so that I could step into a new place of being. The next morning I was blessed to hold my friend while his vet gently put him down. Shortly thereafter I named my next – as yet un-purchased – Chocolate Lab – who many of you know as Brown Dog, since she works here at the church almost every day. I named her weeks before I bought her. I named her "Chadash" which is a name that comes from a line in the Hebrew scriptures where a prophet tells the Israelites that they will be "called by a 'New Name' – which the voice of God will designate."



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In blessing Puller for all he'd been to me I stepped into what was next, and named my brown dog Chadash, knowing I was being called – to be called – by a New Name, and I, intentionally and consciously, stepped into the transition this life shift offered me. I wanted a new companion – and that was 14 plus years ago. That brown dog who works at this church diligently, now with her mostly unfunctional back legs, I know that every day with her is still a gift. Last year, when I became less able to be all that I had been used to being this book (*Jo holds up the book When the Heart Waits*) invited me to stop thrashing against my body and stop thrashing against the speed of the medical system and stop thrashing against the darkness of the chrysalis I had entered into unwillingly and to remember the potential and the actual invitation for change and for transformation.

A few months ago we got the headaches under control, and yet without the time spent in my life when I was unwillingly paused I know I wouldn't just naturally have asked those questions that Meister Eckhart talks about. I wouldn't have gained the answers which lead me and can lead each of us on the journey that is our eternal human path toward more wholeness, toward the Divinity within and to whatever is next in our life.

This book is the true story of a woman's passage – a crossing over from one identity to another. It's also a guidebook and an invitation. And someday, if you find yourself like Dorothy and Toto, or like the Hebrews in Egypt, might you stop thrashing and remember Christ's journey into and through the tomb and the caterpillar's transformation into a butterfly. And might you choose to stay as long as you need to

- in the chrysalis
- in the questions
- in the indescribably transformation that is possible.

Amen.