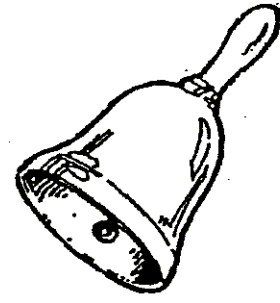


The Plymouth Bell

**Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ
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Of Patience, Quiet and Catching Crabs

As a child, my back yard was a salt marsh called Fence Creek in Madison CT. If you traveled down Fence Creek and around the bend, you would be in Long Island Sound. It was a delightful playground for my sisters and I as we watched the tides, seasons, and wild life come and go. It was a place my grandfather spent a lot of his time gathering clams, oysters, and crabs for the dinner table. In the summer I would run bare foot through the mud always mindful of snakes, snapping turtles, and the sharp claws of fiddler crabs. I especially enjoyed the peace and quiet I found in the salt marsh from my private rock. From this spot I would sit and read, or contemplate life. I considered it the place where my spiritual journey began in earnest at age 6. In that year, two weeks before Christmas my family lost Nelly Morse, my great-grandmother and Walter Hubbard, my grandfather. They died a week apart, and it was a blow for our family. It was on that rock, the place where I felt closest to my grandfather, that I would ask God questions and listen for answers amidst the ever changing flow of life in the marsh.

The salt marsh was not always quiet – it was disrupted by summer fun. Speed boats would try to make the turns in record time and then in August the banks would be lined with those trying to catch blue crabs for dinner. We would take the boat out into the creek; attach a weight and a fish head to the lines my grandfather had made. Then, we waited patiently for a tug on the line. We would slowly pull the crab up, being very careful to keep him just below the surface so our helper could net the crab and deposit it into the bucket. Every now and then a crab would get loose in the boat. We would all screech and jump out of the way as the angry fellow marched along the boat with claws snapping. It was great fun even though I didn't have much interest in eating the crab dinner at that age.

I recall the first time I took my daughter, Amelia, out on Fence Creek. Most people are put off by the odor of a salt marsh and the abundance of mosquitoes not to mention the mud that covers your feet and legs. This was a test we usually put our friends and dates through to see if they passed muster. I remember my brother-in-law who turned back because he swore there were more mosquitoes in Fence Creek than in Viet Nam. My sister married him anyway. Amelia, on the other hand, was a good sport. She knew how much this meant to me and managed to make it to the boat wearing an old pair of sneakers. I told her, "Don't panic if a crab gets loose in the boat." At this point I saw her eyes roll, and she gave me a look as if to say, "what am I doing out here!"

Needless to say we had a pleasant time. We enjoyed the quiet of the marsh (one must be quiet to attract a crab to the bait, after that it's a free for all). We enjoyed our conversation as I shared stories of my grandfather and adventures of other times in the salt marsh. We did a fair job of catching blue crabs that afternoon but then, all of a sudden, one got loose in the bottom of the boat. It was now Amelia's turn to screech and panic as I carefully cornered the fellow, netted him again, and threw him in the bucket with clear instructions not to get out again.

These adventures on Fence Creek remind me of the changes that are taking place at Plymouth. We are experiencing grief with Charles' departure and retirement. We remember him and tell stories about him.

During his time among us we experienced a God who brings peace, quiet, and routine to Plymouth but now with this interim period has turned things upside down – have we become too set in our ways? How do we need to grow? These are just some of the questions we need to ask in the time ahead as we prepare for a new beginning with a new pastor who will (hopefully) be with us as long as Charles. As we move through this interim period there is one thing I know for sure – a crab will get loose in the boat. Just remember, stuff happens to help us grow closer to God. So, please don't panic; the God I know will be there to help net the crab and put it in a new bucket.

See you in Church.

Rev. Patricia

Sunday School Teachers & CE Board Members

Organizational Meeting August 7th

After church, on August 7th, there will be a meeting (either in the "fishbowl" classroom or the upstairs L-shaped classroom) for teachers, worship center greeters, and anyone involved with youth at Plymouth. Items to be discussed include: upcoming school year, class lists and curriculum, and the safe sanctuaries policy. Hopefully, there will also be time to discuss any proposed changes in Christian Education and youth programs. Cookies and coffee will be provided, and we'll try to keep it to an hour (or so)!

Also, please remember to fill out the safe sanctuary background check forms that day or prior to that day. There will be copies available that day to fill out, or there are forms in the church office. Completed forms can be turned in to the church office and will be placed in a confidential envelope. Thanks for helping us update our records!

Our Church School News

After a month of Summer Sunday School in July, August is a quiet month for the Church School as the teachers and Board of Christian Education prepare for fall programs and many of our families are vacationing.

Thanks to all of the volunteers who helped the July Sunday School classes run smoothly. Special thanks to Melissa LeBlanc, who let 14 children help in the garden on one very hot Sunday!

There are no Sunday School classes in August. Children are invited to worship with their families – look for the Children's Bulletins and crayons at the back of the church. Nursery care is provided for the youngest children throughout the summer (and the rest of the year).

Church School classes for the 2011-2012 year will begin on Sunday September 11 – look for more information in next month's Bell!

August Drop In Scripture Study

The next Drop In Scripture is to gather around the table in the lounge on August 28. Matthew 18:15-20 is the gospel reading for our consideration. This is one of the more challenging texts. On first reading it has to do with maintaining good order in the church. But I have to think the reading goes deeper than disciplining

offending members of a congregation. The conversation promises to be lively. You will want to be sure to reserve the date in your calendar.

Thank you to Plymouth

My heartfelt thanks to the members and friends of Plymouth Church for all the spiritual support and prayers during the final months of my father Gordon's life, and upon his passing on July 2. Your kind expressions of sympathy have meant a great deal to me and my mother.

Lyle Anderson

Gay Pride March

Madison's Gay Pride March will be held on Sunday, August 21st. The route will be somewhat different from previous years as folks will start off from Library Mall and proceed up State Street to the Square where there will be a rally. Ever since becoming an Open and Affirming Congregation in 1996, Plymouth UCC has had a strong number of marchers who have participated in the Gay Pride March each year. This has been one of the many ways that Plymouth has been able to demonstrate support of the Madison GLBTQ community. We hope to have a good sized contingent this year as well. Folks who are interested in being a part of the Plymouth group should meet at 12:45 near the University Bookstore where we will join walkers from other faith communities to walk behind the Coming Out, Coming Together banner.

For complete details on the weekend events please go to www.wisconsinpride.org. There you will see details about an interfaith worship service that will be held at First United Methodist Church on Sunday at 9:30 a.m. Rev. Amy DeLong will be preaching (she was recently put on trial because of her sexual orientation and for performing a Holy Union). Plymouth questions can be directed to Laura Stalder at 698-8759.

THAT WAS THEN; NOW IS PARADISE

(A refugee perspective on hot weather and other Wisconsin privileges)

by Jane Rowe

We were fussing, Son Blaise and I, to our friend Indra Rai about his family of six having to live in a small second floor apartment with no cross-ventilation and an air conditioner the size of a shoebox. Indra gave a little chuckle.

“You know, in camp in Nepal it was often this hot. At night we had no air moving because of mosquito netting to prevent malaria. And we had terrible bedbugs! To us, this is Paradise.”

Partner Carol and I picked up Indra and the boys the other day to join Emilie Huckaby and us at the Goodman Pool (Thank you, Plymouth Church for the Rai family membership!) and I decided to ask Indra more about what their life had been like during the family's 15 years in a refugee camp. I have a better idea now of why Wisconsin is Paradise!

The family “home” in camp was a bamboo hut, numbered C-1 in the row of 90 huts making up their section. Two families, totaling 17 people, shared one pit toilet. (Those of us at Plymouth who have traveled in Asia may be familiar with the hole-in-the-floor-with-two-foot-pad toilets common to all but the best hotels.) Paper products being an unknown luxury, water was carried in a cup into the toilet space.

The water supply improved in both quality and quantity as the camp aged and international refugee organizations strove to improve conditions. But it always meant carrying buckets from shared taps to family quarters for washing clothing, bedding and bodies and for cooking. That was part of every woman’s daily work. Cooking, on charcoal and wood fires, was done in the huts, which could be very smoky indeed. Wood, although plentiful in the surrounding forests, could only be gathered by the women twice a year when they were allowed out of camp for that purpose. They carried back huge bundles, on backs, shoulders and bicycles!

Imagine, if you will, lovely Lok Maya and tiny Grandma Buddhi bent under such a burden!

It is not surprising that with dirt floors, very dusty or muddy roads and smoky quarters that clothing had to be washed daily. It was, of course, hand-scrubbed in tubs, wrung out and hung about on ropes and bushes. The inevitable and dangerous waves of dysentery and other food- and water-borne illnesses could create nightmare amounts of dirty laundry.

And many, many deaths, Indra reports solemnly, especially of children. He himself had dysentery three times and is grateful to have survived. He estimates that about 60% of those in the camp had poor health much or all of the time, with very poor health care and virtually no surgeries permitted. Both Indra and Lok Maya seem blessed with genes for robust health for they managed to stay among the fortunate 40% and to have their three boys survive their very hazardous early lives. Many of the families we are welcoming to Madison from such camps in Nepal are patently malnourished and frail.

After confining virtually everyone to camps for the first year or so of their forced exodus from Bhutan, the Nepalese authorities began to allow the men to take work on the “outside”—in Nepal and northern India. This work was much sought after by the men and boys, for it meant some money to purchase fresh vegetables and fruit, clothing, utensils and necessities not provided by refugee relief organizations. Indra worked several times at coal mines in India, at teaching (middle school!) in Nepal and at any kind of temporary physical labor he could get. These jobs meant long absences from his family, but greatly helped their survival.

Travel, especially such trips as the 36 hour bus ride to India, was a strenuous and hazardous business. Busses, whether local or long-distance, were routinely loaded until people were jammed in, sitting and standing, and lying on the roof! The roads were rough, dusty or muddy, crowded and narrow, so that all traffic was in a constantly dangerous state. Indra says that many people fell off of busses and were killed.

For Indra, however, such trips, whether to India or to Katmandu or out to some small Nepali village to teach, meant a much healthier life for his family in the refugee camp. Food was always rationed and usually limited to the staples of rice, flour, oil and sugar and occasionally a few onions and some garlic, doled out every fifteen days. Earnings meant precious additions to the Spartan diet, as did fishing in the muddy river which ran alongside the camp. Fishing nets—very expensive tools at 700 or 800 rupees (\$10-\$11) each—were prized possessions and Lok Maya Rai was known to be especially skilled at netting fish. Spices and herbs were sorely lacking in the rationed food provided and cash added much to the flavor, as well as the nutrition, of the family’s diet. Lok Maya, Buddhi and the boys seem to eat very little meat, even now. In camp, Indra, who does like meat, was able to purchase pork from a brother-in-law who was a butcher and an occasional local chicken. Meat occurs as a flavor-enhancer in noodle dishes and soups rather than as a main feature of a meal. (Be it hereby noted that Lok Maya is a *wonderful* cook and has promised to teach Jane Rowe how to make some delicious Nepalese dishes!) Although most of them still must live mostly on food stamps until they get regular employment, all of the Bhutanese refugees gasp at the plenty offered by our grocery stores.

Indra has a “Level 9” education, he told me, which qualified him to teach up to that level in the camp school and “outside.” He taught history and “everything else, from English and science to health. He has a considerable English vocabulary, much of it from considerable reading. That was no small accomplishment in camp, where there was no electricity. He could read at night, when working outside the camp, via one metered bare electric light bulb. (Because he is so largely self-taught in English, Indra is laboring to improve his accent which can make his pronunciations hard for this old lady to comprehend. It took several passes for me to realize that “shurz” was “church”!) The two older Rai boys had English classes in the camp school, but no practice with speaking our language. Shailesh (pronounced “Silas”), who will be in sixth grade at Cherokee Middle School this fall, shows considerable mastery of English already.

Those of us fortunate enough to be involved with the Bhutanese refugee community in Madison know that these delightful people know how to have fun. I asked Indra what they did for fun in camp.

“Always soccer!” he exclaimed (for he loves to play soccer). “During the first years we played with bare feet on gravel and it hurt for a few days. Then UNESCO scraped the ground for us.” And they played badminton, table tennis and volleyball. No TV, of course, and no video games, computers, kids’ bikes, scooters or manufactured toys. Even with so much sickness and empty bellies, they played and had fun together.

It seems so hard to us: this abrupt transition into a world of so much that is mechanized, computerized, of infinite variety and delivered right into our homes with no physical effort. Yet nothing can ever seem so hard, Indra assures me, as the effort of merely surviving in the refugee camp they left behind six months ago. Now they are, indeed, in Paradise. Those of us who have lived, perhaps unknowingly, in Paradise all of our lives, welcome them whole-heartedly to America and to Plymouth Church!

Global Ministries: Bearing Good Fruits

By this God is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. John 15:8

When school is in session there is a church service on Sunday mornings for the boarding students. About once a month or so students lead the service and this month our Scripture Union group led the order of worship and hymn-singing, offered prayers, read the scripture, received the offering, and shared a message during the sermon time.

The scripture the students chose was the story of the birth of Jesus in Matthew 1:18-25. Mphonyana and Bokang both spoke on these verses. Their names are quite appropriate for the text as they mean “Small Gift” and “Praise! Give thanks!” respectively. As God was with both Joseph and Mary during their difficult time, so God is with us even today in the problems we face. Mphonyana, in particular, could testify to this as she was hospitalized after falling and suffering burns from hot water she was carrying. She has made a full recovery and although small in stature, she has a big heart for Jesus!

Later that afternoon our SU meeting was blessed by the presence of Mr. Waza. Ntate Waza is the high school coordinator for Scripture Union in Lesotho and he was spending a week visiting schools in the southern part of the country. He organized and led the SU Camp in December and is greatly loved by the SU kids. The group members were delighted to see him again and he will be leading a training session here for student leaders at the end of the month. He has borne much fruit through his labors in reaching out to the young people of Lesotho.

Jesus says in the remaining words of John 15:8 that by bearing fruit you will be “showing yourselves to be my disciples.” While telling others we are disciples is well and good, I’m always mindful of that old adage, “Actions speak louder than words.” Even better, we could remember that old grade school tradition of “Show and Tell”!

Mark Behle is a missionary with the Lesotho Evangelical Church. He is a mathematics teacher at Masitise High School, Lesotho, Africa.

Health Page

For Our Souls, Minds, and Bodies: “Everything in creation points to the creator.” St. Ephrem (4th century Syria)

Life blesses us with ordinary events that, without warning, bring us in touch with the sacred. You know, simple things: moments of quiet, alone time; the love visible in the eyes of our partner; a gentling that settles within us as we cradle a child.

And the Bible offers to quiet our restlessness as well. Psalm 62:8, “Trust in the Lord at all times, you people; Pour out your heart before God; God is a refuge for us.” Or Psalm 46:10, “Be still, and know that I am God...”; so many verses to reassure us; to touch our most intuitive center.

As we observe children, we witness their souls as they enter this world (full of the knowledge of God). A child freely receives love’s warmth. Laughing easily and crying with abandon, their expectation that everyone is sharing their emotions is obvious; they are not alone. Children come to us still keenly aware of something larger; something they trust. Unless we, as flawed humans, change their expectations, they’ll sense love as fluid and eternal in their lives. They realize the truth without considering it. Love was with them before, will continue with them in this world, and follow them beyond.

Throughout our lives (perhaps discovered and lost, over and over again) God is our constant; we are inseparable because of the Love. But we will puzzle and ponder that love all of our lives, as our natures dictate. But take heart, questions do not deter the Holy. Ask and listen.

There are, I am sure, people who carry the answers; not just in flashes of wonder and sudden clarity, but at all times. St. Ephrem’s wisdom “everything in creation points to the creator” reveals a joyful certainty. What is Holy in us is steadfast; what is human may struggle. Intentionally opening our hearts, perhaps in quiet reflection, is one way to explore our relationship with the Creator. May we all remember the call to a larger understanding within the midst our busy day-to-day lives. Amen.

The Road Home Bulletin

Did you know? Most of the adults served by The Road Home and other homeless services providers have experienced childhood trauma. This trauma may have occurred through prolonged or repeated violence, maltreatment, neglect or deprivation in important interpersonal relationships. Such trauma physically affects brain development and, if untreated, may lead to impulsive, violent or addictive behaviors, and anxiety and depression into adulthood. Fortunately, the effects of trauma can be alleviated over time through safe environments and strong trusting relationships.

“Erika” was raised by her father, an addict/alcoholic. She and her siblings were often homeless, often went without food, and experienced violent and inconsistent parenting. Erika has a difficult time trusting anyone and has symptoms of severe anxiety, depression and PTSD. She was homeless with her own children a year ago and was accepted into the House-ability program. At first, she only communicated by calling her case manager, screaming, in a crisis. Over time, however, she has learned to trust the relationship and has settled into housing stability. Now Erika is becoming calmer overall, has more patience for her children, and has begun to ask for help and problem-solve before a crisis point. She is able to focus on goals beyond the immediate moment and is currently working on enrolling her daughter in an art program.

While we do hold families accountable for program rules and expectations, staff and volunteers at The Road Home also work hard to keep in mind that challenging situations or behaviors may stem from a history of trauma. We ask, “I wonder what happened to that person?” instead of “What is wrong with that person?” as we determine the appropriate response and offer assistance.

Thank you,
Rachel Krinsky