

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
305 EAST MAIN STREET  
DURHAM, NC 27701  
PHONE: (919) 682-5511**



## **“One-Day Snow”**

**A sermon by Marilyn T. Hedgpeth  
Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38  
March 08, 2009**

---

It's one of God's great gifts, isn't it, the one-day snow?  
It interrupts the normal routine of our busy lives  
    and gives us a chance to perceive the world differently.  
It's like putting on 3-D glasses and seeing the world  
    through crystal pure lenses of perfection.  
It's brief, and doesn't interfere terribly,  
    but just enough to give everyone a much-needed lift.  
And then it's gone. The sun comes out. The snow melts.  
    And the sky turns Carolina or Duke blue.

I looked forward to this past week's predicted mega storm  
    all day Sunday, March 1; the day that was supposed to come  
    roaring in like a lion.  
I woke up early Sunday morning,  
    said, "rabbits, rabbits, rabbits," like my mother told me to do  
    on the first day of every new month,  
stumbled down the stairs, flipped on The Weather Channel  
    to catch Weather On The 8's local radar,  
to see how far north the storm was tracking,

then adjusted my day accordingly,  
rescheduling bible study for 3 p.m. so I could be home in time  
to catch the first flakes settling tentatively on our porch railings,  
on the cars' slick surfaces, and on the deck.

Monday morning came, and I wasn't sure before I opened my eyes:

Was it quiet enough to be snowy outside?

I listened for the absence of the usual noises,

but still heard cars making a sloppy trek up Cole Mill Road;

still heard the fire truck across the street beep-beeping  
as it backed slowly into the station;

still heard the crows still cawing their early morning greeting.

But when I peeked through the slats of the bedroom blinds,

I saw the lovely white uniformity of a transformed world,

and the child in me rejoiced with "no school in Charlotte/Mecklenburg" joy.

And I couldn't stop staring at the colorless beauty of the weighted tree limbs,

the dusting that sprinkled the air as the wind gusted,

the playfulness of the birds.

A one-day snow is about as perfect as it gets.

Still, still, still, for a day, beauty is everyone's possession.

And peace seems possible, as we are all drawn up short of meddling.

Abram and Sarai experience something like a one-day snow, too.

They go to sleep in turmoil, their family life a mess,

their other-mother fighty and flighty,

fearful for the fate of their surrogate, her son;

their long-standing marriage rocked to its core by

jealousy, mistrust, and domestic violence;

their aging bodies another day older, their walking bent as they

beep beep backing slowly into their favorite seats,

feeling the gravity of their many days;  
their hope for eternal life through subsequent generations....tenuous.  
But on this day, they awaken to a radically different scenario.  
God Almighty appears like a mega storm out of the blue,  
to change their names and their world view.  
And God Almighty caws an early morning greeting,  
promising a different way of being.  
From this day forward, God says to Abram, you will be a father by Sarai.  
And from this day forward, God says to Sarai, you will be a mother by Abram.  
Royalty will come from you both.  
Not just one, but many nations will spring from your tired little bodies.  
And you will ALWAYS have land, a place to call home,  
from this time forth, and forevermore.  
BUT - it will cost you your blood;  
the blood of your foreskin and the blood of your womb.  
But if you are willing to pay the price, I, God Almighty,  
will be your God into perpetuity.  
And you, Abraham and Sarah and the many different nations  
who spring from you, will be under my kind, loving care,  
always, constantly, without a hiccup, or a blink.  
And then life returns to normal in Canaan, as if the one-day snow had melted.  
Color rushes back into the scene.  
Abraham and Sarah are still aliens in a foreign land;  
still as aliens to one another in their marriage.  
They are still barren as a couple.  
They are still old as the hills.  
But God has come to them as a one-day snow.  
and their worldview has been forever altered, as they have had the gift  
of seeing things from God's perspective;  
as they have had a glimpse of God's dream for all of humanity.

And as bad as it might get when the color comes back into the scene,  
Abraham and Sarah know for a fact,  
that God Almighty has entered into an everlasting covenant with them,  
and God now dwells in their midst in covenant love.

Old Testament scholar Robert Alter, in commenting  
upon his love of Hebrew scripture says,  
"There is surely no greater poetry that has come down to us  
from anywhere in the ancient world than the Book of Job,  
or the finest of the Psalms,  
and no more brilliant and probing narratives than the stories  
of Jacob and Joseph and David."

Besides, biblical literature "asks us to examine our lives  
and to reconsider what our vision of reality is..."

The idea that we are created in the image of God is elusive and ambiguous,  
and it is through "subtle and profound representation of individual  
character in biblical narrative" that we get glimpses of what it means."  
(*Believer*, January. From *Christian Century*, February 24, 2000, p. 8)

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in the children's book, *God's Dream*,  
asks children, "Do you know what God dreams about?"

God dreams about people sharing.

God dreams about people caring.

God dreams that we reach out and hold one another's hands  
and play one another's games and laugh with one another's hearts...

God dreams that every one of us will see that we are all brothers and sisters –  
yes, even you and me – even if we have different mommies and daddies  
or live in different faraway lands.

Even if we speak different languages or have different ways  
of talking to God.

Even if we have different eyes or different skin."

Tutu knows that in the biblical narrative we get brief glimpses  
of God's dream, which alters our vision of reality,  
and, likewise, alters our way of being in the world.

Abraham and Sarah awaken one morning  
to a blanket of God's presence and to God's promise  
of a different way of being and a different world view:  
barren ones will become fertile; old ones will become like the young;  
provincial ones will become global; poor ones will become like royalty;  
the homeless ones will find homes,  
and God will be with them.

God's presence and God's vision for how things will be  
is sometimes as brief as a one-day snow.....  
but it changes Abraham and Sarah's worldview forever.

It is as if they had put on 3D glasses to see the world  
through the crystal pure lenses of God's perspective.  
It is as if they had awakened to God's dream for all humanity.

In Mark's Gospel, the one-day snow event precedes today's passage.

It comes on the heels of Jesus' questions to his disciples,  
"Who do people say I am?"

"Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others,  
one of the prophets," they reply.

"But what about you," Jesus asks. "Who do you say I am?"

And with vision pure as the driven snow, Peter replies,

*"YOU are the Christ."*

And everything fades to dazzling white, as they all have something of  
a transfiguration epiphany at that moment.

This is the Christ:  
the long-awaited redeemer;

the chosen One;  
the anointed One;  
the One foretold by prophets;  
the One who will make scarlet sins as white as snow;  
the embodiment of God's new covenant.

BUT – the color comes rushing back into the scene, as Jesus explains

that his Messiahship will cost him his blood:

that he must suffer many things, be rejected by his colleagues,  
and ultimately killed, before he rises again after three days;

Jesus' Messiahship will cost him his blood,  
and it will be costly to his followers as well.

And at this instant thawing, Peter rebukes Jesus,  
and Jesus rebukes him right back, saying, in essence.

"Peter, you're only looking at this through human eyes.

I'm trying to get you to look at things through God's eyes,  
to wake up to God's dream,  
to use me as your new crystal pure lenses."

As author Gary Cummins says, "God see us with eschatological eyes,  
eyes looking back from the consummation of all God's dreams,  
with forgiveness." (Gary Cummins. Building Bridges, p. 35)

"If you want to follow me," Jesus tells the crowd,

"you must deny your own way of seeing things,  
and adopt God's point of view, God's perspective,  
God's dream for all of humanity, all nations,  
seeing things through the lens of the cross,  
God's suffering love for all people made manifest in his Son."

The cross then becomes the crystal pure lens,

through which God asks us to view our less than perfect world.

While I was on sabbatical in February, one of my agendas  
was to try a life experiment, which I called "undivided attention".  
What if....I wondered....I offered my undivided attention  
to some of my family members and old friends, with whom  
I have been out of touch or marginally present,  
or just plain negligent during these 13 years  
that I have been working every weekend in ministry.  
So I made a list of about 20 people, my A list of those nearby;  
there are others, too.  
And I contacted them one by one, and made a point of offering them  
my undivided attention, face to face, in person, to eat or to visit  
or to have coffee, or to just hang out together.  
And I found them in various states of being, but all very welcoming  
and amazingly willing to continue to share their lives with me.  
One aunt is 82, and is recovering from knee surgery and two heart attacks.  
She is small and frail now, but we laughed together  
talking about my now-deceased parents  
and some of the funny things we remembered about them.  
One friend from elementary school has three young adopted children and  
a marriage that is holding on by a thread.  
She invited me into her home, which looks like a mega storm has  
blown through it.  
But her children are very happy,  
and I was encouraged, despite outward appearances,  
that they still have a chance of making it as a family.  
Another college friend is undergoing chemotherapy for colon cancer.  
She used to be a model when she was younger,  
and she still radiates that beauty,  
even though she is far past model-slimness.  
She wears braces on her teeth now, as a sign of hope,

that when she comes through this chemotherapy,  
she will have an even more beautiful triumphant smile.  
And I knew that our time together was like a one-day snow,  
fleeting, but exquisitely beautiful,  
weighted by our continuing affection for one another;  
dusted with memories from our common past;  
playful with laughter.

And even though I fully realize that the next day will come,  
and the color of melting will come rushing back  
and life will get messy and slushy once more,  
God Almighty has made a covenant to be in our midst,  
to be our God and to make us his people,  
to kindly care for us constantly, without a hiccup or a blink,  
and to bless our future generations.

And I felt good leaving my friends and relatives,  
just as I felt good in leaving this congregation for a month:  
we are in good hands; we are in God's hands;  
we are in God Almighty's covenant embrace,  
living into God's caring, sharing dream for all humanity.

Thomas Merton, the Catholic mystic, prescribed prayer

As a means for tapping into God's dream.  
"Prayer," he said, "transforms our vision of the world,  
and makes us see it...in the light of God."

(Cummins. *Building Bridges*. p. 88)

And so, as our Lenten discipline, let us pray:

*Praise be to God for the one-day snow; for divine interruptions from above; for  
God's in-breaking presence that makes all things new; for the Christ, the  
anointed One, sent from above to white-out all of our sins. Praise be to God,*



*who, when the thaw and slush returns, and the color of life rushes back in,  
abides with us in a rainbow of grace. Amen.*