

Date: August 9, 2015  
Scriptures: Psalm 13; Ephesians 4:25-5:2  
Title: No Doubt about It

DEARLY BELOVED,

I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR THE GIFT OF TIME AWAY.  
IT WAS SO VERY GOOD TO SET MY CALENDAR ASIDE  
KNOWING THAT AS I DID I HAD TWO WEEKS  
OF UNSTRUCTURED, UNCOMMITTED TIME,  
TIME TO DO WHATEVER I PLEASED,  
TIME TO LISTEN TO THE DRUMMING OF MY OWN BEATING  
HEART,  
TIME TO SIMPLY BE AND BE IN THE MOMENT.  
YOURS WAS A GRACIOUS GIFT OF GRACE-FILLED MOMENTS.

IT WAS GOOD TO GO,  
AND IT IS GOOD TO BE BACK.  
I MISSED YOU;  
MOST ESPECIALLY I MISSED WORSHIPPING WITH YOU.  
IN HER BOOK, LEAVING CHURCH, BARBARA BROWN TAYLOR SAYS,  
"MOST OF DO NOT LIVE ESPECIALLY HOLY LIVES. . . .  
WE SPEND MOST OF OUR TIME  
SITTING IN TRAFFIC,  
PAYING BILLS,  
AND BEING IRRITATED WITH ONE ANOTHER.  
YET, EVERY WEEK, WE ARE INVITED TO STOP ALL OF THAT  
FOR ONE HOUR AT LEAST.  
WE ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN A GREAT DRAMA  
THAT HAS BEEN GOING ON WITHOUT US  
FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS,  
AND . . . WILL GO ON AS LONG  
AS THERE IS A SINGLE PLAYER LEFT STANDING."  
OH I MISSED WORSHIPPING WITH YOU IN THIS COMMUNITY  
AND KNOWING THAT AS WE DO  
WE ARE TOGETHER AND INDIVIDUALLY BEING STRENGTHENED  
TO GO INTO THE WORLD AND LIVE FULLY HUMAN LIVES,  
LIVES TOUCHED BY THE GRACE OF GOD.

GRACE-FILLED MOMENTS ABOUNDED IN ITALY.  
SOON AFTER ARRIVING IN ROME,  
WE RENTED CARS AND DROVE TO THE COAST.  
GEORGE HAD MADE RESERVATIONS FOR US AT LE ROCCE,  
BUILT MORE THAN FORTY YEARS AGO,  
THE HOTEL LAYS NESTLED IN ONE OF THE CLIFFS  
THAT RISE UP SEVERAL HUNDRED FEET  
ABOVE THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA  
BONE Tired AFTER BEING IN TRANSIT MORE THAN 24 HOURS,  
WE GRABBED A BITE TO EAT AND WENT TO BED.

THE NEXT DAY I WAS VERY QUICKLY REMINDED  
WE WERE NOT IN TEXAS ANY MORE.  
EVERYWHERE I LOOKED MY EYES BEHELD ABSOLUTE BEAUTY —  
    **THE** VAST BLUE SEA,  
        **THE** WHITE STUCCO HOTEL RESTING LIKE A LOVER  
        AGAINST THE CLIFF'S EMBRACE,  
            **THE** PLANTS GROWING FROM EVERY NOOK AND CRANNY,  
            **THE** MASSIVE PALM TREES PLACED STRATEGICALLY  
            BOTH TO SHADE AND MAGNIFY ANY BREEZE,  
                **THE** BLUE-DOMED SKY THAT KISSED THE SEA FAR  
                OFF IN THE DISTANCE.

AND EVERYTHING I HEARD WAS VASTLY DIFFERENT  
FROM THE SOUNDS I WAS ACCUSTOMED TO HEARING -  
    **LAUGHING ADULTS** AND CHILDREN PLAYING IN THE SEA,  
    **LOVERS** TWO PATIOS OVER FROM OURS WHISPERING SECRETS  
    TO ONE ANOTHER AS THEY BREAKFASTED,  
    **A WOMAN** IN THE ROOM ABOVE US  
    MOVING FURNITURE AS SHE CLEANED THE ROOM.  
OVER, UNDER, AND AROUND THESE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS  
SOUNDED THE SONG OF CICADAS.  
THEY SANG IN A LANGUAGE I DID NOT UNDERSTAND  
AND YET, I KNEW THAT THEIR SONG  
    BOUND THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS TOGETHER  
    AND CALLED ME TO OPEN THE EARS AND EYES OF MY HEART.

HOW VERY DIFFICULT IT IS FOR US  
TO OPEN THE EARS AND EYES OF OUR HEARTS.  
IN THE BEGINNING,  
    OUR DIFFICULTY STEMS NOT FROM SOMETHING WE DO  
    BUT RATHER FROM SOMETHING THAT HAPPENS TO US.  
THIS THING, WHICH IS NOT OF OUR OWN MAKING,  
    COMES TO US IN THE FORM OF A LULLABY.  
IT IS A LULLABY WE HEAR FROM THE MOMENT OF OUR BIRTH,  
    A LULLABY THAT SOUNDS THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES.  
IT IS DIFFICULT TO ESCAPE THIS LULLABY,  
    FOR IT ENVELOPES US  
    MUCH LIKE A MOTHER SWADDLES HER CHILD.  
IT COMES UNBIDDEN AS WE SLEEP  
    AND ASSAULTS US IN OUR WAKING HOURS.  
THIS LULLABY,  
    BECOME A SIREN SONG,  
    SEEKS TO DECEIVE US INTO BELIEVING  
        THAT WE ARE THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE  
        AND THE GRATIFICATION OF OUR DESIRES  
            IS THE HIGHEST AND BEST USE OF OUR LIVES.  
THE WORLD SINGS THIS SONG THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES,  
    SINGS IT SO LOUDLY  
    THAT IT OFTEN DROWNS OUT

ANY OTHER SONGS.  
IF AND WHEN WE FALL PREY TO THIS SIREN SONG,  
BOTH WE AND THE WORLD ARE THE POORER FOR IT.

OTHER SONGS DO SOUND IN THE WORLD.  
THEY HAVE BEEN SOUNDING  
AND WILL CONTINUE TO SOUND  
AFTER THE END OF TIME.  
THESE SONGS HAVE BEEN SUNG BY PROPHETS,  
WISE WOMEN AND MEN,  
SEEKERS OF EVERY AGE AND FAITH TRADITION.  
ONE AND ALL, THEY CALL US  
TO TAKE OUR EYES OFF OURSELVES,  
TO LISTEN TO SOMETHING MORE  
THAN OUR OWN SELFISH DESIRES,  
TO LOOK UPWARD, OUTWARD, HEAVENWARD  
AND IN SO DOING OPEN THE EARS AND EYES  
OF OUR OWN HEARTS.

THIS MORNING, PAUL INVITES US  
TO OPEN THE EARS AND EYES OF OUR HEARTS,  
TO LOOK HEAVENWARD,  
AND AS WE DO,  
TO LISTEN TO THE SONG HE IS SINGING.

IT IS A SONG  
THAT TEACHES US HOW TO LIVE  
MANIFESTING THE GRACE OF OUR GRACIOUS GOD.  
HE BEGINS BY ENCOURAGING US TO SPEAK TRUTH TO ONE ANOTHER,  
TO LET ALL WE SAY REFLECT GOD'S REALITY  
TO SPEAK WITH LOVE AND COMPASSION,  
SPEAK SO OUR WORDS BUILD UP AND DO NOT TEAR DOWN.

SUCH TRUTH HAS CERTAINTY AND FORCE.  
IT CREATES AND SUSTAINS THE COMMUNITY AND ITS MEMBERS.  
THEN, PAUL URGES US TO BE ANGRY BUT NOT TO SIN.  
HERE, HE IS MAKING A DISTINCTION  
BETWEEN SIN AND SINNER.

IN EFFECT HE IS SAYING IT'S OK TO BE ANGRY ABOUT SIN  
BUT NOT OK TO BE ANGRY WITH THE SINNER.  
WE ARE TO REMAIN IN RELATIONSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER  
AS GOD REMAINS IN RELATIONSHIP WITH US,  
BECAUSE OUR RELATIONSHIPS ARE SO VITALLY IMPORTANT,  
PAUL URGES US TO BUILD JUST SOCIETIES,  
SOCIETIES THAT STRIVE TO PROVIDE ALL PEOPLE  
ACCESS TO HONEST WORK,  
WORK THAT ALLOWS THEM PROVIDE  
FOR THEIR DAILY NEEDS,  
AND ALSO HAVE SOMETHING LEFT OVER  
FOR THEM TO HELP THE NEEDY.

AS INHABITANTS OF JUST SOCIETIES,

WE ARE TO PUT AWAY ALL BITTERNESS AND WRATH,  
ALL ANGER AND WRANGLING,  
ALL SLANDER AND MALICE  
AND BE KIND,  
TENDER HEARTED,  
AND FORGIVING OF ONE ANOTHER.  
WHAT A BEAUTIFUL SONG OF LIFE TOGETHER PAUL SINGS .

WHO AND WHAT WE LISTEN TO DO MATTER.  
WHO AND WHAT WE ALLOW TO INFLUENCE  
THE WAY WE LIVE AND INTERACT WITH OTHERS,  
ARE OF ULTIMATE IMPORTANCE,  
FOR THEY INFLUENCES THE TENOR OF OUR LIVES.  
THEY INFLUENCE THE SONG WE SING,  
THE SONG THAT SOUNDS  
LONG AFTER OUR DEATH.

GOD'S SONG IS A SONG OF EXTRAVAGANT LOVE.  
OURS IS TO ALSO BE A SONG OF EXTRAVAGANT LOVE,  
LOVE THAT GIVES TO OTHERS AS GOD HAS GIVEN TO US.  
LOVE LIKE THAT BUILDS JUST SOCIETIES.  
LOVE LIKE THAT MAKES PRESENT GOD'S KINGDOM ON EARTH.  
NO DOUBT ABOUT IT.  
SO, LET US SING AS BEST WE CAN  
THE SONG GOD HAS GIVEN US TO SING.  
LET US RING THE BELLS THAT STILL CAN RING. AMEN.