

March 16, 2020

Dear FCCH,

Who doesn't love a good story? I love it when my kids ask me to tell them "A Magical Forest Story" before bed. It's our made-up enchanted world that's filled with all sorts of crazy characters and fun adventures. There's no telling what will happen. Because, as you know, the more, "I never saw that one coming" plot twists there are, the better. But as someone wrote, "When it comes to our actual lives, we prefer something less sensational, even boring. We want our stories to be predictable, safe, controllable, and catastrophe-free." But stories like these are not "good" stories, are they?

So, who doesn't love a good story? It turns out, when it comes to our own lives, too often...we don't. And therein lies the perceived struggle. I tend to think that I have the pen in the story of my life. I've titled the book, numbered the chapters, and sort of feel like I have it all mapped out. "It's going to go just...like...this," I tell myself. And then it doesn't. Something happens that jolts the proverbial pen out of my hand, or more accurately, reveals that I never had the pen to begin with. Something happens that suddenly reminds me that I'm not writing this old tale, I'm a character in it. And when I finally come to grips with and submit to that reality, the next right question is how will I handle this scene that I'm in and faithfully fulfill the role that I've been cast to play? One way that I've found helpful is to remember the stories and the characters of old. I think, "Where have I encountered this scene or part of the story before? Is this more like David when he..., or Esther when she..., or Moses, or Samson, or Peter, etc.? You get the idea. God is the master Storyteller *and* Storywriter. The Storyteller of the Bible is the same Storywriter of our lives. And the more we get to know how God writes stories, the more we can perk up in the times like we're in and say, "Hey! This detour or delay or difficulty looks familiar. This is just like the time when..."

So, here we are, and we find ourselves practicing "social distancing" and facing a scene for Candidate Weekend that none of us would have scripted. I can certainly say, I didn't see this one coming. It's hard and disappointing. But we must remember that this is God's scene, God's script, and God's story. With the eyes of faith, we can live with the attitude of, "I can't wait to see the beautiful purpose and redemptive turnabout that God has in mind for all this." J.R. Tolkien once wrote to a friend about a word that he [Tolkien] had coined. It was 'Eucatastrophe': the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears. It's the moment or moments in the narrative when sorrow literally *turns into* joy.

Perhaps our inability to gather face-to-face this weekend will turn into a much greater appreciation for that moment (Lord-willing) when we can. Perhaps the distance that we are forced to endure together this weekend will turn into a much greater joy of our togetherness in the future. I am believing for that eucatastrophe. In the meantime, I thank God that we're living in a time where so many digital means of connecting are available to us. I look forward to connecting with all of you this weekend over these different mediums. And yet, I also long for the time when we can greet each other face-to-face and enjoy the increase of the fellowship that we share in the Holy Spirit.

As believers, no matter what surprising twists and turns we may encounter along the way, we know that Jesus Christ is the same – yesterday, today, and forever! God is good. Christ is risen. The Spirit is moving, and the one Good Story of God's redemption in Jesus is going forward, his truth is marching on, and the best is yet to come!

Waiting with you,

Rev. Jeremy A. McKeen