 **Disasters and Us**

**Who in the world would turn down a huge wedding banquet in Jesus’ time? When Jesus walked the earth, these wedding feasts could last up to a week, with plenty to eat and drink. So why didn‘t the invited guest to the wedding banquet want to go to this huge feast? Probably for the same reason people wouldn’t go to a wedding banquet today. They didn’t like the hosts or his son. Perhaps the guests thought the host was beneath them, not of their elevated, inflated belief they were better than the host. Perhaps the son was thought to be a rabble rouser, a boat rocker, a rule breaker and a disgrace to the finer, more religious people in the community.**

**The parable is about God and his son Jesus. The wonderful thing is God welcomes everyone to the banquet we call heaven. He welcomes those who are invited and refuse to come. He also welcomes the strong, the weak, the good and the bad. There is one requirement to go to this feast waiting for all of us: we have to want to be there. It seems like everyone would want to be with God and sit at the banquet he has prepared for us, but there are people who just don’t have the time for such silliness as heaven. Some are too busy accumulating heaps of money; some seek fame and fortune over God. Some spend their whole lives never seeing what is right before them, the beauty of the earth.**

**Yet heaven can be emulated here on earth. Heaven lives in the beauty of the earth surrounding us in forest and streams and rivers and flowers, and animals and all the other wondrous things God has given us to enjoy. We could make the earth a garden of love and light and beauty, if enough of us wanted to do this.**

**But today there are some who are destroying the earth. Maybe not consciously, but I wonder what else we can call those who reject the reality of climate change as they continue to place money over the health of the earth and the health of people. We now live in a country where almost weekly disasters occur. Hurricanes, followed by more hurricanes, followed by floods, then a mass shooting. Now there are huge fires devouring large swathes of Northern California. We stumble forward watching leaders and others ignore climate change as they scramble to make more money and look the other way rather than look at the hurt and devastation that is happening. All but one of the disasters I mentioned was caused by climate change.**

**I appreciate the part of this particular parable where one man is sitting at the banquet table without a wedding garment. The wedding garment is what lives in our hearts. This particular guest wanted everything, he wanted to keep his wealth, and didn’t want to acknowledge his heart was closed to the many people he had hurt to gain his wealth. He wanted to sit at the great banquet, but didn’t want to let go of what he thought had been the penultimate of his life’s work, his money and his influence.**

**The King, God sent this man to the outer darkness, because the man’s heart had turned to stone. Doesn’t that sound terrible, to be sent to the outer darkness. We who know and love Jesus will not experience the outer darkness. Not because we’re perfect or do everything right, but because we attempt to do what we can for those around us and for the survival of our earth, our home.**

**But like me, do you ever feel you’re on overload, sort of in a constant state of stress and wondering what the next disaster will be? I would never have considered the epicenter of this great fire in Northern California would be Santa Rosa. A town we lived in for twenty-three years, a place where our children grew up and went to school through high school. Now the high school one of our sons attended has burned down. The section of the city where we lived has been evacuated. Whole areas of our town are gone, while friends and our family have been deeply affected by this disaster.**

**So I wonder what will happen next. And how will any of us who deeply believe in our Lord Jesus Christ handle yet another disaster? We all know, in this time we live in, there will be another disaster. Will it be another fire, another hurricane, more floods, another catastrophic waste of human life brought about through the carnage of gun violence? Or some other disaster we haven’t even thought possible. None of us knows what might happen, how could we? What has happened recently through floods and fires, and hurricanes, and gun violence is beyond any of our imaginations. It’s no surprise many of us feel stressed and concerned about what may occur next in our country and in our world.**

**I’ve thought about our country, our world. I’ve prayed about our country, our world and how we might help. I believe in the power of prayer, especially when many of us are praying together. Sometimes I know it feels as if we can do nothing to help. But no one, nothing can take our ability to pray away from us. I’ve come up with a simple suggestion on how all of us can connect together and pray together.**

**What if we each stopped at noon every day and offered up a prayer for whatever we feel is the most urgent need. We might pray for hurting people, or for loss of homes and lives. We might pray for floods and fires and hurricane to stop, or for whatever comes into the foreground of our minds. If we just did this every day, if we just took a minute or two to pray and connect with one another, I know something good would come of these prayers.**