

SMALL GROUP MINISTRY
THAT DAY: SEPTEMBER 11, 2001
The Rev. Glenn Turner, September 2001

OPENING WORDS:

The central task of a religious community is to unveil the bonds that bind each to all. There is a connectedness, a relationship discovered amid the particulars of our own lives and the lives of others.

- Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed

Our conversation and our ministry begins when we turn to each other and ask: What are you going through?

CHECK-IN/SHARING: (25+ minutes)

The facilitator should explain briefly that this is a time when each person in the group has about one or two minutes to share their joys or concerns, to share what is happening in their lives, what they are going through.

FOCUS: (30 minutes)

The following is a reading from Loren Eiseley:

"...on the edge of a little glade with one long, crooked branch extending across it, I had sat down to rest with my back against a stump. Through accident I was concealed from the glade, although I could see into it perfectly."

The sun was warm there, and the murmurs of forest life blurred softly away into my sleep. When I awoke, dimly aware of some commotion and outcry in the clearing, the light was slanting down through the pines in such a way that the glade was lit like some vast cathedral. I could see the dust motes of wood pollen in the long shaft of life, and there on the extended branch sat an enormous raven with a red and squirming nestling in his beak."

The sound that awoke me was the outraged cries of the nestling's parents, who flew helplessly in circles about the clearing. The sleek black monster was indifferent to them. He gulped, whetted his beak on the dead branch for a moment and sat still. Up to that point the little tragedy had followed the usual pattern. But suddenly, out of all that area of woodland, a soft sound of complaint began to rise. Into the glade fluttered small birds of half a dozen varieties drawn by the anguished outcries of the tiny parents."

No one dared to attack the raven. But they cried there in some instinctive common misery, the bereaved and the unbereaved. The glade filled with their soft rustling and their cries. They fluttered as though to point their wings at the murderer. There was a dim intangible ethic he had violated, that they knew. He was a bird of death."

And he, the murderer, the black bird at the heart of life, sat on there, glistening in the common light, formidable, unmoving, unperturbed, untouchable."

The sighing died. It was then I saw the judgment. It was the judgment of life against death. I will never see it again so forcefully presented. I will never hear it again in notes so tragically prolonged. For in the midst of protest, they forgot the violence. There, in that clearing, the crystal note of a song sparrow lifted hesitantly in the hush. And finally, after painful fluttering, another took the song, and then another, the song passing from one bird to another, doubtfully at first, as though some evil thing were being slowly forgotten. Till suddenly they took heart and sang from many throats joyously together as birds are known to sing. They sang because life is sweet and sunlight beautiful. They sang under the brooding shadow of the raven. In simple truth they had forgotten the raven, for they were the singers of life, and not of death."

Analogies are never perfect, but from Eiseley's metaphor we can focus on three aspects of our response to evil:

- 1) our outrage
- 2) our anguish
- 3) the song that we will pass to one another

Remember that this time of focusing is not an argument or a debate, but an opportunity for each of us to give voice to what is in our hearts.

CLOSING WORDS: (join hands)

Hold on to what is good even if it is a handful of earth.

Hold on to what you believe even if it is a tree which stands by itself.

Hold on to what you must do even if it is a long way from here.

Hold on to my hand even when I have gone away from you.

-- Nancy Wood