

Sandra Miller: Recommitment 2004

Recommitment 2004

It is both a privilege and a responsibility to bring the word to you on Recommitment Sunday. Let me begin by offering a prayer from the closing words of Psalm 19:

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.
Amen*

In Jeremiah reading we read the promise that “The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah....I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they will be my people....they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.” A new covenant.

Webster’s dictionary defines a covenant as an agreement between two or more parties, **and** the agreement between the members of a church to uphold a set of common beliefs. God did not in our ancestral past make a simple promise to write the law on the hearts of all the peoples of the houses of Israel and Judah in perpetuity at some point in time. The Jeremiah reading is an invitation to all the children of Abraham to enter a new covenant with God. Perhaps this is the reading that invited Jesus into the covenant. The reading is an

invitation to this Body of Christ, Seekers Church, born of the houses of Israel and Judah, to enter into the covenant with God. That is what we are about today as we make covenant with each other as members and stewards of Seekers Church to be in covenant with God, and it is right that we should renew the covenant every year because the Body of Christ changes.

I can't help myself from citing the adage that the only constant is change. As individuals we have experiences that influence our perceptions of time and place, we make new friends and lose old ones, we age, we change physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The same holds true for us as a community. This past year has been filled with change for each and every one of us, and for Seekers.

My life is just one small example of the changes one year can bring, and I can't imagine what it would have been like to weather those changes without being in covenant with Seekers, sharing and bearing my joy and pain. Where but in loving community would so many prayers have been offered for myself and my father with the passing of my mother? Where but at Seekers could I have shared the word about my grief over that loss, and the joy I felt in developing a new relationship with my father? Where but at Seekers would I have found the support, spiritually and financially to participate in another [Faith at Work](#) pilgrimage to Guatemala? Where but at Seekers could I come to terms with the ending of my call at [Potter's House](#)? Where but at Seekers could I have found the prayerful support for discernment over the opportunity to work at [Joseph's House](#)? (And yes, in case you haven't heard, being at Joseph's House is good work, and I am responding joyfully with my life.) Where but at Seekers could I stand at the lectern on such an important day and know that each and every one of you is holding me in prayer, and trusts me to bring you the best

word that I can?

The changes this year at Seekers have been dramatic. We have seen birth, death, diminishment, and renewal in our membership. This year we bid goodbye to the home we were birthed in, and we moved out into a new neighborhood with prayers in our hearts that we were doing what God was calling us to do. We prayerfully opened our doors, and we went knocking on doors, and the response has been swift and good. We have been welcomed by neighborhood leaders, the space is being used by neighborhood groups, we have been graced with guests and prospective members, we have been invited to collaborate with another faith community, and we have become a local employer. The changes also reach deeper into the Seekers community.

The heart of our community is in its [mission groups](#). Mission groups are where we are most intimately known, and where we are accountable as individuals to the covenant of Seekers. What does it say about Seekers when we look at our mission groups today?

[Celebration Circle](#) is down to three members who are still dedicated to helping the worship flow out of and feed into the life of Seekers, but who are embarking on a journey of prayerfully looking at its call to determine what changes are needed in this time and place to remain vital and call forth new members. [Learners and Teachers](#) is still holding responsibility for the [School of Christian Living](#), but it too is just three in number, of whom two are sensing new community calls. [Mission Support Group](#) has had a rise and fall in numbers, and my understanding is that there is deep discernment taking place among its members. The Artists

Mission Group is still strong but has lost a vital member in Martha Phillips, and seen a change in perspective with Liz Vail's retirement from making art. [Living Water](#) has been deeply affected by and is still in mourning over the loss of Linda Strand. [Journeying with Children](#) is down to two members working with influxes of children of all ages, even as they bring us an important intergenerational class on hunger and abundance. Seeds of Hope is strong at three members holding the responsibility for aspects of our outreach.

River of Light, joined together around a call of healing, after 15 months just last week laid down its call. The individuals that comprised that group, of which I was a member, are individually all still called to healing in the world, so why are we no longer a mission group? There is no simple answer, and indeed in the last few meetings some new ideas emerged around which there was a great deal of interest. The reality however is that as individuals we formed bonds, grew intimate, found healing, and the result was change. Our paths to offering healing became individual journeys, our group process no longer held us together towards a common goal, and we don't have the skill set to implement the new visions that emerged. My personal sense of closure finds expression in a poem entitled *questions and answers* by Lucille Clifton that also echoes the theory we inherit from Jesus and from our Church of the Saviour origins that lies underneath our commitment prayer:

*what must it be like
to stand so firm, so sure?*

*in the desert even the saguaro
hold on as long as they can*

*twisting their arms in
protest or celebration.*

*you are like me,
understanding the surprise*

*of jesus, his rough feet
planted on the water*

*the water lapping
his toes and holding them.*

*you are like me, like him
perhaps, certain only that*

*the surest failure
is the unattempted walk.*

River of Light members took a long and wonderful walk together, and then in the long tradition of [Church of the Saviour](#) we honored God's message that the time was not right for us as a group.

Is there good news for Seekers in the state of our mission groups? If we see struggle as an opportunity for growth, and growth as an instrument of change, then the answer is yes. For those of us who have committed to membership, that is the journey we have under taken, a journey of change, the journey to which Jesus invites us. Change is hard, and Jesus and change are subversive.

Abraham Heschel says that "Prayer is meaningless unless it is subversive." Prayer invites change. I am preaching to the choir in this company but I invite you to truly breathe in, in prayer the core of our commitment statement:

*"I am a Seeker. The Seekers Church is my community of faith.
I acknowledge that I am called by God to be part of this*

community.

I have joy and pain to share, and joy and pain to bear. As part of the Seekers community, I am a growing Christian. I will be intentional about naming my relationship to this community, sharing my gifts from God with the community and the wider world, and living out my commitment of faith by:

Nurturing my relationship with God and Seekers through spiritual practices or disciplines;

- Fostering justice and being in solidarity with the poor;*
- Being a steward of the whole of creation, beginning with the natural environment;*
- Working for the end of all war, both public and private;*
- Responding joyfully with my life, as the grace of god gives me freedom"*

In the Gospel lesson from Luke the widow seeking justice is an example for us all. I often find Luke's gospel lacking in back story. This passage starts out with "Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray and not to lose heart." It doesn't tell us anything about prayer. Indeed, if taken at face value the story makes the widow out to be a nag. There isn't any exposition about her real situation. No wonder the disciples were so often bewildered; so often being told something new with no framework for understanding. Would that the passage told us what it was like for her each time the unjust judge denied her plea. She had no rights in her society, she did not have the support of a community, but I imagine that she went to the temple and prayed to God to find a way for her voice to be heard. She wanted change, and she was willing to continue to pray and seek justice.

Our commitment statement is a very subversive prayer. We pray it in community in order to find the support from each other and from the whole body to do the real work and live into our prayerful promise to share our gifts from God with the community and wider world. As a community our gifts are boundless. We are caretakers, mothers and fathers, and grandmothers and grandfathers. We are poets, artists, and musicians. We are social justice workers, non-violence practitioners and peace activists. We are pastoral counselors, teachers, and lay ministers. We are mourners and celebrants, ritualists, and makers of sacred space. We are individuals walking hand in hand to make a whole greater than the sum of its parts, each of us as integral to the covenant as another.

If by chance you are not a member of Seekers, if you have come to see what you can see, and experience what you can experience, I invite you to consider being an instrument of change at Seekers, and being changed by Seekers. We are an open and welcoming community, walking as best we can the way that Jesus taught us.

I hear Jesus in the words of Robert Frost's Poem *The Road Not Taken*:

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,*

And both that morning equally lay

*In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back,*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

I pray that Seekers, one and all, and all together continue to walk the road less traveled by.