

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 2, 2020

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"Over There!"

Based on Isaiah 55

I'd like to introduce you to a friend of mine. Some of you met her last fall at our Presbyterian Retreat at Fairhaven, up Silver Star Mountain. Rev. Juliette is from Madagascar, and currently a student, as I am, at the San Francisco Theological Seminary. At home Juliette has the formidable task of being the Executive Director of a Seminary that trains leaders from the poorest corners of her country. Not only is she in charge of theology, but healthcare, agriculture, children's education, and life skills as her students are given a wholistic education to better support themselves, their families, and teach skills to take back to their remote villages to improve the quality of life for everyone. Between classes they plant gardens and cultivate fruit trees and raise chickens so there is enough food to share, and extra to sell at the market and earn cash.

When I asked Juliette what she did in her spare time, she proudly said she was trying to learn how to knit and crochet before she went home. "A new hobby," I asked.

"A necessity," she answered.

**"YOU WILL GO
OUT IN JOY
AND BE LED
FORTH IN
PEACE;
THE
MOUNTAINS
AND HILLS
WILL BURST
INTO SONG
BEFORE YOU,
AND ALL THE
TREES OF THE
FIELD
WILL CLAP
THEIR
HANDS.—"
~ISAIAH 55:12**

"In Madagascar," she continued, "there are no heaters in our homes, and winter is cool and damp. Most have no money for a furnace, and many can not even afford extra blankets. I am learning to knit so I can show the women at home, and the

wives of students how to make their own blankets. But I just don't know where I am going to get the yarn and needles. No one has ever seen such a thing where I come from.

"Yarn?" I said surprised. "All you need is some yarn and some needles? I can get you yarn. I can get you needles. I can probably even get you simple patterns. All we need to do is figure out how to ship it over to you. I can help you with that."

"You have yarn?" Juliette said, with such wide eyed amazement.

"Yes," I said. "I have yarn." "How wonderful! God has so richly blessed me this day."

And just like that, the opportunity to change one little corner of the world has transformed from a dream in Juliette's mind to a hopeful reality in ours, as yarn and needles begin to collect in my office. Yarn. Not fancy, expensive yarn. But just yarn.

"and all the trees of the field will clap their hands." (Isaiah 55:12)

In the beginning, our Creator created all and said, "It is good!" There was fairness and equality. There was kindness and there was sharing. There was no hunger or pain. There was no suffering or war. There was no struggle, for the minds of those present knew the value of the gifts of life and food and peace and shelter they had been given.

But as slippery as a venomous snake, the whispers of greed and power and dissatisfaction echoed here and there. Over time, some came to have more than others, some shared less and stored more for a rainy day. Still others began to think themselves better or more important than others and lines began to be drawn in the sand about anything and everything.

As Christians of today, we are called in the scriptures to change our thinking and use our energy to move ourselves and our communities back to a time of fairness and equity, but the bureaucracy of the world and the politics and the slippery whispers of corruption continue to rebel against our desires. Some hide behind the quip phrases of "it's not my problem," or "charity begins at home," or "you can't change the bureaucracy, so why even try!" And since many of the places and people who need our help are far, far away from our comfortable life, it is easier to think of Mission

Work as an 'over there' problem.

**Over there, over there,
Send the word, send the
word over there!**

~George Cohan

But our God will not allow us to so easily move the issues 'over there' out of our line of sight.

*"As the heavens are higher
than the earth,
so are my ways higher than
your ways
and my thoughts than your
thoughts.*

*As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and
flourish,
so that it yields seed for the
sower and bread for the eater,
so is my word that goes out
from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I
desire
and achieve the purpose for
which I sent it.*

And what is God's purpose?
To bring joy.

Over there.

Over here.

Everywhere.

How do we do it?

Any way we can.

Raising money for a
clean water well.

Supporting AIDS
medication and
immunization
programs.

Sending farmers to
teach the forgotten art
of planting crops and
gardening and tending
to animals.
Even shipping yarn to
Madagascar.

Can the work of the
Presbyterian World Service
and Development solve all the
world's problems? No.

Can we ever make the Garden
of Eden a reality again? Not
likely.

So should we give up trying?
Never.

Share joy where ever you can:
be it money, time, yarn.

- 'Over there' in
unknown places you
will probably never
visit.
- 'Over here' in the
familiar places that
sometimes go
unnoticed.

Make a difference,
somewhere.

Why?

Because...

*"all the trees of the field will
clap their hands." (Isaiah
55:12)*