

“IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED”

Haslett Community UCC – January 9, 2011

I'd like to tell you about Anna Madsen.* In her intriguing blog “OMG”, she says, “Today is the first day of the season of [Epiphany](#). I like to call it the ‘season of God-made-knowings,’ the time of the liturgical year when we pay close attention to moments when Jesus is revealed as God... When we have an epiphany, say, that we love somebody, or about a math formula ...or about our calling in life, things, even if just for a moment, become clear. We see matters for what they are.”

Here's a story where Jesus “sees” matters for what they are. This is from the beginning of *The Gospel of Gabriel* by Edward Hays, a fanciful “gospel” patterned after the Biblical ones. (I read 2-3 pages)

Can you relate? Do you sometimes hear, with inner ears, a nudge, even a downright shove, from somewhere? Seemingly from God? Are you at a place in your life where you've given up any idea of “greatness”? Have you settled? And if you have, does that mean your life to this point is meaningless?

In Ed Hays' imaginary account, Jesus is very much like anyone else. He's living a life of honest work, devotion to God, moderation and hope. Nothing to be ashamed of at all. He is not radical, not fiery, not bold. And he's already 30, which in that time was not young. Since we have few stories of Jesus' youth, we can only guess how he spent those years. He was clearly special, as when he stayed behind and learnedly conversed with the leaders in the Temple at age 12. But for all we know, he settled into a modest life as an artisan in Nazareth, not sure where else to go or what else to do. He waited. And waited. And waited.

Then along came his weird cousin, John. Oh, great! And the Angel is telling me God wants me to go have *him* dunk me in the Jordan? Part of him is thrilled; part of him is cautious; and a big part of him is scared to death. It isn't magical and it isn't easy, but hard as he tries, he cannot resist what God expects of him.

I believe this story is close to the truth—that Jesus, being fully human, did not just magically and easily move into the role of Messiah, but was filled with trepidation. One could say that if there is no trepidation, perhaps the calling is not from God. The powerful divine connection within him, however, would not leave him alone.

We know this to be true of many others since, though they might not have been as “filled” with Divinity as he was. I recently shared with Kurt news about Chad Gandiya, an Anglican Bishop in Harare, Zimbabwe. Kurt added him to your Prayer Chain. The churches there are under great threat, with worship not even allowed. Religious leaders are always in danger.

I met Chad in the mid-80's when he and his wife, Faith, came to MSU so she could work on a PhD in Agriculture. During the years they were here, Chad served the Episcopal Church in a variety of ways, ever gentle and kind, ever faithful and brave. Later, for a time, they lived in exile in England, as it was too dangerous for them to return to Zimbabwe. Though their story seems dramatic and far away, they lived right here in our midst, not that different from you or

me. To Chad and Faith I am sure God said, “You are my beloved and in you I am well pleased.” To Anna Madsen I am sure God said “You are my beloved and in you I am well pleased.” And I am sure God has said the same to people here in this church. Just think of what you did for others at Christmas!

We are living at a time of great hope, great fear, great possibility. With the decline of our economy and the necessity for us to re-examine our priorities, to change our life styles; with the needs that surround us and the seeming impotence of institutions to fulfill their purposes; what more apt time for each of us to listen, to wonder if we are to stay safe and settled, or are we called to open ourselves to conversion, to turning around? For when we turn our faces toward God and even haltingly choose to follow God’s call, God sends a dove—a dove that sings “You are my beloved, in whom I am well pleased.”

O Living Breath of God, O Morning Song of Love, O you in whom we live and move and have our being! We have been asleep too long. Heal the unseeing part of our lives. Lead us to our awakening places. Awaken us to the new light. Open the doors of our hearts, the windows of our souls, the walls of our minds. Awaken us to hope. Awaken us to joy. Awaken us to love. Awaken us to new insights. Make our hearts ready to receive the brightness of your presence. To you we give praise. Amen. From *Seven Sacred Pauses* by Macrina Wiederkehr

*Anna Madsen is a Lutheran theologian, living in Sioux Falls, SD, whose husband was killed and son seriously injured in an automobile accident in Germany about 6 years ago. Her son, now 9, continues to have many needs, though his recovery was quite miraculous. She bravely moved from Germany with her two kids (daughter is 7) to Sioux Falls in order to fulfill her commitment to Augustana College there, which she did for several years. She has begun an independent ministry which was recently featured in *The Christian Century*. Her website is: www.omgcenter.com Anna is connected to us because her father and mother, George and Marge Madsen, lived in East Lansing for several years while George was Pastor of University Lutheran Church.