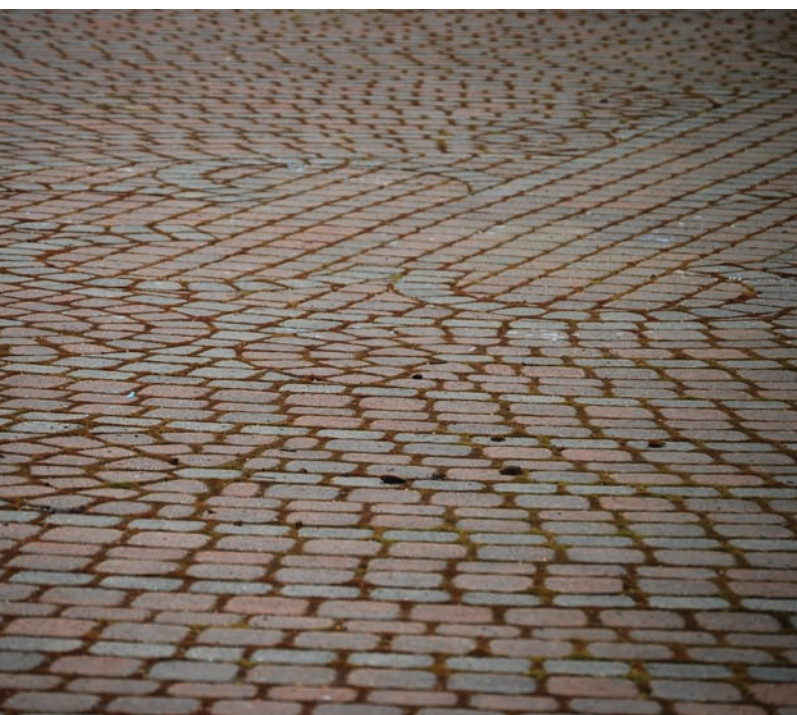




THE GIFT OF FAITH TWO STRANGERS, ONE SHORT CHAT



Staff Photo

Rev. Jennifer Yocum is pastor of the Forest Grove United Church of Christ. *No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey you are welcome here.* www.fgucc.org

It had been almost a year since I'd seen her when the phone call came. "Hi," she said, "I don't know if you remember me, but I came to see you a couple of times last year."

I did remember her. We'd met during the Coffee Shop ministry now called "The Pastor's Pint" where I plant myself in a local pub or coffeehouse on Wednesday afternoons to talk to whomever comes by. She'd come at my invitation to talk about faith, which is to say "trust in the presence of a loving God."

Churched folk see faith as a gift. Christian faith gets shared through stories that happen in the Bible and in life; faith gets sung into hymns and rock and roll; faith gets seen in the goodness of creation, but some people add a dark side. "Faith," they say, "is incompatible with certain lifestyles."

So she'd been taught. And because "certain lifestyles" included her sexual orientation, she'd suffered for it. Yet she still yearned for relationship with the Holy.

We talked. I spoke about the Bible's social and historical context. The Bible as a whole says very little about what we would call "homosexuality." Most of what it does say is rooted in cultural practice that was either non-Jewish (in the time of Leviticus) or exploitative (in the time of Paul.) I talked about our church being a place where, no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

She spoke about being kicked out of her church and being shunned by her family. She talked about hoping to reclaim her trust in a loving God, but thinking that God could not love her because of who she was. She also talked about drinking, drinking a lot, to hide the pain of her Godforsaken-ness.

I told her that God loved her, no matter what. I also told her that I was worried about her drinking. I recommended books, groups, and AA. Then she left town.

"I don't know if you remember me," she'd said on the phone. But I did remember her thin shoulders, hunched over her tea cup as though anticipating a blow. I remember her looking so lost and scared and beaten up in her soul. I remember praying for her to find her way to new life.

"I don't know if you remember me," she said, "but I've thought about you a few times since I moved and I just found your phone number. I wanted to tell you that I've been sober for six months and that I've found a spiritual group that I meet with every month. And my life is going well, so I thought you'd want to know."

This is a story of resurrection, redemption and release. A story of light overcoming the darkness and a new life of truth overwhelming the pain and lies of the past. I think maybe I'll remember that. I think that I won't ever forget.

Amen.