

## **CRIBB<S>NOTE – OCTOBER 28, 2007**

Things happen and life changes quickly. For awhile we laugh and frolic in the warmth of daylight; then, flames flash and the world turns upside down. Everything familiar is no more. Devastation spreads, high winds batter against structures, while ferocious, hungry wildfires race out of control. Nothing is new. The seasonal blast of dreaded destruction terrifies and burns across our lands. We have seen it before, but each time it is not like anything we have known.

Statistics do not tell the stories of profound loss. Television coverage cannot convey the true extent of nature's triumph. The Elements will not be tamed or easily contained until every living breath within them is snuffed and smothered. And even that does not secure us sufficiently from hot embers re-igniting and roaring back to heated life. Fires sweep across Southern California with a too commonly known familiarity that almost makes it possible to predict the paths they will take to consume whatever remains available. We have seen it before but we are not ready for its haunting visitation.

In the aftermath of flickering waves of orange, blue, and white heat we assess what has occurred and wonder what will we do now. Even if we exist a distance from the epicenter of that perfect fire storm, we are not immune from its murderous impact. Our lives are intertwined with brothers and sisters who no longer remember life as it once was...even a few days ago. Everything has changed. A resilient spirit pushes us to the edges of denial toward the cliffs of surrealistic vistas. We ponder, pausing temporarily to consider forks in the road of our lives and the turns we did not take. So we ask, "Now what?"

Do we seek a more significant meaning for our lives? Amid the shock and awe of true natural power, how do we speak with God? Is God still speaking to us? How do we know? Can we be still and listen?

Just as the calamities of this week's tragic episodes were unfolding, we were rejoicing as we hosted on our campus the Fall Meeting of the Central Association of the Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ, USA. The sanctuary was filled with delicate, glorious voices of Samoan singers and Latino youth. Rhythmic expressions of African American teenagers swayed us and our Conference Minister the Rev. Dr. Jane Heckles invited us to experience the "Rock and Roll" of a wilderness people.

Our weekend continued with an extended invitation to our neighbors to bring their pets for blessings. They came and we prayed. A new thing happened and we were changed. God's Spirit lives, moves, and stirs within this congregation.

This morning as the smoke and ash saturate the Southland, we are not forgotten. God is still speaking and we are waiting to hear what our Conference Minister the Rev. Dan Romero will reveal. We are a blessed wilderness people. We welcome to our midst one who is friend, brother, pastor, mentor, leader, and visionary.

Thank you, Dan, for coming by and speaking a Word. If ever there was a time when your leadership is greatly appreciated, it is in this moment and in this place. May the tongues of fire rest upon you and fill you with the inexhaustible Spirit that cannot be quenched or doused. We receive you with open hearts and minds. We are glad you are here with us.