

**Ps 147:1-11, 20; Is 40:21-31;
1 Cor 9:16-23; Mk 1:29-39**

02-04-18 Service of Holy Communion

We have come to the beginning of African-American History Month, also the month noted for both President Washington's and President Lincoln's birthdays, and for St. Valentine's Day. Happy February!

Last week, I caught a few minutes of a PBS broadcast about a musician named Thomas Dorsey. He was born in Georgia in 1899. He lived 93 years and passed away in Chicago in 1993.

His most famous song is *Precious Lord, Take My Hand*. It has been sung by many famous artists, from Mahalia Jackson and Johnny Cash to Elvis and Aretha Franklin. I thought of Tom Dorsey this past week as I read the wonderful promises given by God through the Prophet Isaiah:
He (the Lord) gives strength to the weary,
And to *him who* lacks might He increases power.
Though youths grow weary and tired,
And vigorous young men stumble badly,
Yet those who wait for the Lord
Will gain new strength;

They will mount up *with* wings like eagles,
They will run and not get tired,
They will walk and not become weary. (vv 29-31)

Tom Dorsey was out of town playing in Ma Rainey's Wild Cats Jazz Band. He got a phone call to come home. The voice on the other end told him his wife, Nettie, had died in childbirth. He started for home, only to discover his newborn son died two days later. Tom's grief was too much to bear. He had been raised in a Christian home, the son of a preacher and a church organist. But he left Georgia for Chicago, vaudeville and playing jazz in nightclubs. His mom had been after him to come home and apply his musical talents to God's work – sharing the Gospel message. He resisted for years.

From 1932 (the year Nettie died), Tom Dorsey began the great work of bringing the sound of the blues into the church. Some pastors rejected his sound, saying it was "the devil's music." But, Tom persisted, through economic and personal depression, grief and mental breakdown, to create a new, vibrant music called gospel. Gospel Music. This music drew many into the church

with its rhythm and its genuine, personal response to Jesus Christ.

Tom Dorsey became impatient with standard music publishing's reaction to his music, so he founded his own brand: Dorsey House of Music. At last he received acceptance and success – and founded the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses. He has been inducted into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame and the Gospel Music Association's Living Hall of Fame. Dorsey's songs appear in hymnals and song books everywhere.

The Apostle Paul exclaims, “I have no right to boast just because I preach the gospel. After all, I am under orders to do so. And how terrible it would be for me if I did not preach the gospel!”
(1 Cor 9:16 GNT)

Paul continues, “Among the weak in faith I become weak like one of them, in order to win them. So I become all things to all people, that I may save some of them by whatever means are possible.

All this I do for the gospel's sake, in order to share in its blessings.” (vv 22-23)

What is your share in the gospel’s blessings? Is the Lord calling you farther on to work for Him? Often, a painful episode – heartbreak – loss – can bring you new awareness and perspective. These things could bring about your share in the gospel blessings.

A season of inspiration – even a sudden moment of insight can spark us on our journey with Jesus. The psalmist writes, “The Lord is restoring Jerusalem; He is bringing back the exiles. He heals the broken-hearted and bandages their wounds.” (Ps 147:2-3) I want you to receive your full inheritance – all God has for you in Jesus all the time.

The PBS special on his life quotes Dorsey, “*Take My Hand, Precious Lord* came,” he says, “direct from God.” in August 1932, Dorsey’s life was thrown into crisis when his wife and son died during childbirth. In his grief, he turned to the piano for comfort. (www.pbs.org) Many song writers and other artists say this same thing, or

they say a song came to their mind fully all at once. Paul Simon says the poetry and the music of *Bridge Over Troubled Water* came to him (finger snap) like that. That song appeared as a popular hit. It has since become a gospel standard.

I have to smile when I see Peter in this story from the Gospel of Mark. Jesus healed in the synagogue there in Capernaum. Mark says He went directly to the home of Peter and Andrew. There He healed Peter's mother-in-law. Soon, every family in town brought their sick and lame to Peter's house to be healed. Peter seems to think Jesus should stay and open a kind of healing clinic. But, Jesus rose before dawn – which He often did. He went out to pray alone, and to commune with His Heavenly Father. Peter ran out to find Him. We are all waiting for You, Peter told Jesus. But, Jesus heard the gospel call to move on. He was to share the gospel blessing with many more than just the population of Capernaum. Our Lord explained to Peter – and to us: **that is what He came out to do**. He came into the world to share the message of God's glory and steadfast love with as many as possible.

Our greatest hope is in His steadfast love – divine love that drove Jesus and His disciples out into the towns and villages of Judea. The full measure of gospel blessing is more than an amazing miracle. The presence and the goodness of Jesus Christ brings wholeness, healing, transformation and change. The character of Christ’s kingdom is to challenge and to reshape people’s relationships, their thinking and their behavior.

Will you go where He calls you to go, accepting the full measure of His blessings? Tom Dorsey finally went home to the southland to answer God’s call and share in the gospel’s blessings.

The disciples left their homes and families – their businesses, their long-time friends. They followed Jesus all over the countryside healing, teaching and preaching the Good News. The time has come to share the blessings – blessings of healing, wholeness, spiritual maturity, transformation, joy in the Holy Spirit. It is time for your share in the Gospel blessings!
Amen.