



Congregational Connections

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A COUPLE OF THINGS TO TAKE YOUR MIND OFF THE FACT THAT IT IS FEBRUARY

“Now is the winter of our discontent” is from the first line of Shakespeare’s Richard III. It is a line that essentially says that things have been really bad, but they are going to get better. I am hoping and praying that this might be true as we move through what, for me, is often a bleak season any year, but this one especially. February can be a tough month. As winter drags on, the cold seems to be a little sharper, the snow seems a little heavier on the shovel, the dark night seems to come on too soon and not leave early enough. Even Valentine’s Day can seem like a burden, or a reminder of things yearned for rather than a fun, romantic opportunity, or possibility. Sometimes I am glad February is the shortest month—please, bring on the Spring!

But don’t despair! When I start feeling this way it’s time to start thinking about “some of my favorite things” because “then I won’t feel so bad” to quote Julie Andrews. February 2nd reminds me that I love the movie, “Groundhog Day” with Bill Murray and filmed in nearby Woodstock, IL. Did you know that one of the possible origins of the Groundhog story about an early or late Spring has Christian roots? There is an ancient Christian festival called Candlemas (origin around 4th Century) which takes place on February 2nd—40 days after Jesus’ birth. This is when Mary and Joseph would have presented Jesus in the Temple and according to Luke’s gospel, the aged Simeon proclaims that Jesus is “a light for revelation to the Gentiles...” (Luke 2:32). As part of this “Festival of the Presentation” candles used in church and in people’s homes were blessed in keeping with Simeon’s reference to Jesus. Part of the festival’s traditions was a little rhyme telling that if it was a clear day on Candlemas, spring would be delayed, and if it was a cloudy and overcast day, spring would come soon. According to Wikipedia, the early or delayed spring came to be associated with a Badger’s shadow in German folklore and then the groundhog in the Pennsylvania German-Dutch community. Weird, right?

Anyway, I hope that has given you a little diversion away from feeling the cold seeping through the drafty windows on a winter’s evening. *...continued on the next page...*

...A COUPLE OF THINGS continued...

February is also Black History Month and that is rather cool (no pun intended). I'm sure you all love learning a little more history, and February is a great month to explore some of the "hidden history" that you didn't necessarily learn in school.

A couple of great books I would recommend looking at as you move through Black History Month are both written by Pulitzer Prize winning author and historian Isabel Wilkerson. The first is "The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration". It is a historical study of the Great Migration as Black southerners fled the oppression and danger of the Jim Crow South seeking more opportunities in northern cities and on the West Coast. She follows the stories of three different individuals and tells their stories as representatives of the six million people who made the difficult move.

The second book by Wilkerson is "Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents" it is a compelling book that compares the experience of Black Americans trapped in cycles of systemic racism based on skin color to the caste system in India. One of the more surprising and striking chapters traces how the Nazi party studied the laws and regulations of the United States in the 1930's to learn how they might shape legal codes and government policy to disenfranchise Jewish people in Germany! Powerful comparisons and compelling reading.

I hope that just thinking about these books has moved you away from the cold of a February in Wisconsin and out toward the warmth of spring. Sometimes thinking about something new or even something trivial (Candlemas and Groundhog Day?) is just what we need. In an online article titled, "7 Reasons Why February Is Actually The Best Month" author Cecily Trowbridge wrote, "Just like the groundhog that emerges from his little hole every year this month to give us either immense hope or utter despair, we emerge from our winter slumps. A little daisy popping out of the cracks in the sidewalk; a few weeds making their way through the melting snow. These are sights that February brings."

Yes, let's think about these things! The little signs of hope, the hints of good news, the first daffodil, the first green of the next season. I hope this February truly does bring a positive change in our fortunes and the beginning of better times ahead.

Courage and Peace,
Pastor Scott