

## DIVING INTO THE DEEP

# What does 'still' mean in 'God is still speaking'?

By Deborah Streeter

(This is an excerpt from a sermon preached after General Synod 2003.)

I grew up in a family with many Bibles on the shelf, but the book always left open and ready for consultation was the dictionary, in a place of sacred honor in the living room. At the dinner table, a question about word derivation meant someone was sent, usually me, the youngest, to consult the dictionary.

What do you find looking up the word "still" in the dictionary?

It's an adverb; still speaking, it describes the verb. How speaking? Still speaking. It means continuously, still running, yet, still hungry. Lo, I am still with you.

But still is also an adjective, still waters run deep, still photos, be still and know I am God.

Are the words related, still, continuously, and still, quiet?

It seems they wouldn't be, that they are almost opposites. Still, keep going, keep speaking. And still, not moving, at rest.

In other languages, French for example, the adverb is "encore," like encore, keep going, more! God's always giving encores! And the French adjective, quiet, is "tranquille," tranquil.

But our English "still" is a Germanic word, like the great carol, Stille Nacht, Silent Night. And in German and other related languages, it's like English, the same word, still and still.

How did they come to be used in such different ways?



Rev. Doris Dunn shared her guitar talent at Annual Meeting. John and Susan Sullivan of Community, San Carlos, made the rainbow tie-dyed banners, one for each association. Someone from each of the six NCNC associations took theirs home; find yours, and use it again!

If you go back looking for early uses of the word, "stille" relates to "stalle," like a stall. There is the noun, a stall, which means a fixed position, a place to put something where you want it to stay, a stall, from whence comes the word stable, sty, stool, stallion. You install something, putting it in place, like installing a minister, to indicate you want it to stay. With engines, we get the use of stall to mean stop moving.

So stall, stay there, became still, not moving, tranquil, at rest, quiet.

But how did it come also to

mean continuously, still speaking, it's still hot today.

Well, if you think about it, what's common with still, quiet, and still, continuing, is that they go on, without change or ceasing, they keep on keeping on, things that are still go on still. Still, there, still. Persistently, faithfully.

Now Jesus was a still kind of guy. Actually he was born in a stable, a stall, in a stable, near a sty, next to stallions. It was a still night. Later he stilled the waters. Those are his adjective and noun stills. Still pictures from his life, as it were.

## Children and the gobbling up of grace

(Editor's note: Jennifer Alexander of First Congregational, Santa Cruz, wrote this piece after Communion Sunday.)

Today the children blessed the communion bread. They touched it with their tender hands and kissed it with their innocent hearts.

Then they scampered off to Sunday school with Pastor Dave and returned awhile later full of anticipation. They decked the communion table with brightly colored flowers, laying one yellow flower smack on top of the cup of blessing.

Then they sat in the front row, riveted, waiting for their opportunity to taste the bread they blessed.

I swear they were salivating. And they got their chance, like the rest of us, to dip their little bite-sized piece in the red juice and chew it up and swallow it and go sit down.

But while the rest of us sat content to accept this little morsel of God's grace, those kids wanted more. The minute the service was



Jim Garrison

over, three of them swarmed the communion table as if it were piled high with ice cream, dripping with red fudge and whipped cream.

They pulled off huge, generous portions of God's gracious body and dipped it deep into that red, juicy love until it was drenched with mercy and gobbled it up with absolute unrestrained, giddy joy! Their smiles were radi-

ant, their eyes were full of excitement, their bodies wiggled and bounced with gleeful energy.

As I watched, it struck me that I've learned so much about restraint that I may have forgotten about indulgence.

Maybe I project onto God my human limitations and think there are only little bite-sized pieces of love, mercy, forgiveness, patience and generosity. So I take my little portion and say, "Thank you," and go back to my seat.

What if there is an abundance of these gifts? What if God's generosity really is way beyond my wildest imagination?

What if I was willing to feel my hunger, to salivate for God's presence and to really let myself savor this deep, unending, limitless love?

What if I believed, as these children seem to, that the blessings I offer really help transform ordinary bread into an extraordinary sacrament?

OK, God, indulge me.

## CALENDAR OF PRAYER

Please remember in your prayers the churches of the Sacramento Valley Association:

Federated Community UCC, Alturas  
 First Congregational UCC, Auburn  
 New Faith Community UCC, Auburn  
 Surprise Valley Community UCC, Cedarville  
 Congregational UCC, Chico  
 Community UCC, Clarksburg  
 Elk Grove Congregational UCC, Elk Grove  
 Loomis Basin Congregational UCC, Loomis  
 Squaw Valley Chapel UCC, Olympic Valley  
 First Congregational UCC, Oroville  
 Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Redding  
 First Congregational UCC, Reno  
 Christian Cathedral UCC, Sacramento (in care)  
 Faith Community UCC, Sacramento  
 Oasis Fellowship UCC, Sacramento (in care)  
 Parkside Community UCC, Sacramento  
 Pioneer Congregational UCC, Sacramento  
 Sierra Arden UCC, Sacramento  
 Congregational Fellowship UCC, Shingle Springs  
 Trinity Congregational UCC, Weaverville  
 St. John's UCC, Woodland

## Writing your own psalm

(Editor's note: Ten members of the Sunday evening worship community at First Congregational, Redwood City, recently created a new version of Psalm 23. Their pastor, Carol Barriger, encouraged them to "take a favorite psalm and simply state the meaning or feelings you find there in your own words. Read it aloud in prayer.")

The Lord is my shepherd. He will give me everything I need.

My guide takes me to calm places and leads me out of troublesome ones.

He fills up my emptiness and affirms my goodness.

He paves the way for me in the name of all that is good.

Even though troubles seem to close in on me and would draw my breathe away,

you hold my hand and let me know everything will be all right and I have nothing to fear.

Your knowledge and divinity, they give me peace.

You sit with me and give me a great lunch in the school cafeteria where lots of kids hate me.

You splash my life with joy, as my life overflows with blessings.

Surely good things and kindness will always happen to me.

And I will stay in the house of my Lord for my entire life.