

Your faith has made you well!

Psalm 130; Mark 5:21-42

Being that we're exploring the spiritual expression, there are so many prayers and wonderful readings that capture it, and so I'd like to start by sharing one with you by Joyce Rupp. It says:

"A strong rainbow pours itself out, bending the eastern sky with glory. It brings with it a powerful beauty to soothe my needy heart with hope. And I do believe I hear the Sun wild with wonder and rejoicing, laughing at the once darkened sky, now parted in coloured splendor. I remember then the one who came, who broke our stormy dark apart. And shook our despairing hearts with hope. This one told truth of things beyond, and gave us more than gold. This rainbow filling late-June sky, touches more than just the earth. It makes its mark within my deep and lets my heart look up in hope."¹

The psalm we sang today is such a beautiful piece, and one that I feel very connected to. I love the words that say, "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in God's word I hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning." These are the words of deep longing, sung in prayer to God by the psalmist today. This psalm is one of about eighteen psalms that are considered to be *pilgrim* psalms. These are psalms travellers may have sung while on route or on pilgrimage to a festival in Jerusalem. While on pilgrimage to be with God. A pilgrimage is a journey that is spiritual, as well as geographical, and requires preparation in heart and mind so that one is ready to truly encounter and meet the divine, to meet with God. Spirituals, at the theological banquet, are people who connect deeply with God. They're sometimes called *mystics*. They are the people who long and seek to be one with God. Some well-known mystics are Saint John of the Cross, Teresa of Ávila, Meister Eckhart, just to name a few. Teresa of Ávila was a Spanish nun who established the Carmelites, an order devoted to poverty, quiet prayer, and austerity. Mystics – spirituals – spend a lot of their time in prayer and spiritual practice. Many live a simple life, and often feel connected to creation in nature. They seek wisdom and long to know God in the most intimate way. They seek relationship with God.

¹ Joyce Rupp, *Fresh Bread; And Other Gifts of Spiritual Nourishment*, (Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 2002., p. 78.

In a hymn that we will sing after the sermon, which is entitled "In Loving Partnership We Come", captures this sentiment and longing that mystics have to be with the divine. It says, "In loving partnership we come, seeking O God your will to do. Our prayers and actions how receive, we freely offer them to you." We do believe that God has called us into relationship: into relationship with God, with each other, and in this world. Some of us, though, seek a closer connection with God, with the Creator. And for some, it's been described as the most intimate of relationships, like a couple coming together in love. Being wed. Like the psalmist, when we are in relationship with God, we can share from the depths of our souls. There's an intimacy with the Creator that spirituals long for. Now people who express their faith missionally will struggle to understand spirituals, because they do not see how the lived faith of spirituals makes any difference in the world because it is such an intimate relationship between them and God. But spirituals have a strength. Spirituals bring to the theological banquet the practice of discipline. They connect to God through prayer.

When we reflect on the words of the psalmist today, we hear how the psalmist invokes God as the one who listens. The psalmist speaks of these depths. Depths being "the places of pain, depression, alienation, that leave humans in deep despair, drowning in watery chaos."² We hear the deep pain in the words of the leader of the synagogue, Jairus, whose daughter was at the point of death. We feel the despair of the woman who had gone for twelve years, seeking treatment, longing for release from the pain of her hemorrhaging, who whispers in this crowd, "If I but touch Jesus' clothes, I will be made well." Her faith, her depth of belief and a simple touch brings her wholeness, healing and peace. Spirituals remind all of us that it is never too busy. There is never a time where we should not pray. Spirituals remind us that God will always, no matter what is going on, hear our prayers. After the woman had been suffering for twelve years and was healed by that simple touch, Jesus then takes the hand of the child, who is twelve years old, and she awakes.

Now I don't want to proclaim or fill you with false hopes; these dramatic physical healings are rare. The healing that both women receive comes from a place of seeking peace and wholeness in their lives. Both these women, in the time of Jesus, were considered unclean; they were isolated from others. They were invisible. And yet, their faith made them well. "Jesus acts here as he so often does, transcending social and religious barriers in order to carry out his ministry. Both women are deprived of power. But Jesus, in his compassion, sees their needs and deems them as worthy of his

² D. Cameron Murchison, *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Volume 3, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 104.

attention as anyone else.”³ This passage shows the reality of what can happen when people are isolated, or socially alienated.

So where does one’s faith come from? How did this woman who was hemorrhaging have such deep faith? How did she become healed when Jesus wasn’t even aware of her need? She had heard about Jesus, she knew that he was sent from God...she believed that by touching him, she would be helped. How long had her soul cried out waiting for God like the psalmist today? What was most important, and what spirituals remind us, is that God is present. To both these women, Jesus was present. Jesus’ ministry and mission was not only about teaching and preaching, about reaching out to those in need. He brought healing and peace through his simple presence in this world. Spirituals remind of us God’s presence here and now.

But like all expressions of faith, this can go too far, where the good goes wrong. The shadow side of spirituals is that it can be a journey that becomes only about oneself. The spirituals are at risk that they will forget to reach out to others as we are also called. Spirituals need ecclesials, the people who tend to the church. The people who do the work of the church. Spirituals need to stay connected to a community. Over the past decade, we’ve heard the saying, “I’m spiritual, but I’m just not religious.” The institution of religion can be seen as a distraction for spirituals. Spirituals often do not see the need for a building to connect with God. They connect by walking in nature. The silence, simplicity, and the natural world brings spirituals healing, peace, and contentment.

People who are spiritual will engage in spiritual practices of many faiths. They feel connected and grounded through the practice of yoga, for instance, or meditation. Breath prayers, walking the labyrinth. They seek to *embody* worship. Some have a spiritual director. Some are disciplined and seek knowledge to come to deeper understandings, and have engaged in things like spiritual retreats. Some are the artists in our midst, helping the rest of us to see the spirit, to see God in everything. And some are healers, healers that use healing touch and reiki.

Spirituals are not often noticed by ecclesials, because ecclesials are often busy doing the work of the church. And spirituals, who long for a quiet, deep connection with God, often find the church to be too busy and too social. We hear this in the response from the disciples, when Jesus asked, “Who touched me?” and the disciples responded “How’s anyone to know? There’s too many people here.” The woman in that moment was not seen or noticed, but was felt and was important. People whose lived faith

³ Beverly Zink-Sawyer, *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Volume 3, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 191.

expression is spiritual reminds those who are not that we do need to stop, pause, to pray , to listen. They remind us that we are not alone, that we live in God's world. They remind us that we are called to live with respect in creation with everything in the cosmos. And like the woman who reached out and touched the cloak of Jesus, we long to feel the healing touch, the Spirit revealed to each of us. May the spirituals remind us that our faith can make us well.

I want to end with a prayer that is from Buddha. Buddha says:

"May every creature abound in wellbeing and peace. May every living being – weak or strong, the long and the small, the short and the medium sized, the mean and the great – may every living being seen or unseen, those whose dwelling is far off, those who are nearby, those already born, those waiting to be born, may all attain inward peace. Let no one deceive another. Let no one despise another in any situation. Let no one from hatred wish evil to anyone at all. Just as a mother with her own life protects her only son from hurt, so within yourself, foster a limitless concern for every living creature. Display a heart of boundless love for all the world, in all its height and depth and broad extent. Love unrestrained, without hate or enmity. Then as you stand or walk, sit or lie, until you are overcome by drowsiness, devote your mind entirely to this. It is known as living here, life divine."⁴

⁴ Elizabeth Roberts & Elias Amidon, *Life Prayer; 365 Prayers, Blessings, and affirmations to celebrate the human journey*, (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996. Prayer written by The Buddha, p. 29.