

Prayer is Re-Membering: Preaching in the Time of COVID-19

May 10, 2020

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry

Psalm 31: 1-5, 15-16

Easter 5 Year A

May the God...

Good Morning.

The other day, I sent a text of a quirky postcard to a friend of mine and asked how she was doing. She loved the card. I got a big heart emoji from her, then she followed up with this:

[You asked about believing--]

In hindsight—during my darkest times (and they were dark) how [did I know] God’s Love was in it with me. Not a big burning bush or a Damascus road drama (I wish?), but in the rear view mirror I can “see” the Saints’ that helped me breathe or just get through the next painful hour, minute, day.

I’ve been trying to be mindful of that these days when I’m scared and isolated and lonely (and did I mention scared) and of course thanks to the Irish I know I’m doomed. I ask where the F [BLANK] is God. I think of dark times I went through before. How did I get through the fire? And I remember the night nurse that [who] took care of me for five weeks when I was alone in the hospital in Bend, Oregon with multiple surgery complications...

And, well, I remember. And there’s just a list of saints that (who) have blessed me..(you are on the list). I see the Provision in all of it, and I’m so grateful.

SHE SAID:

I don’t find much strength or comfort in “believing” right now...

But when I am ‘re-membering” I can almost breathe—

“Into your hands I commend my spirit.” ”Into your hands I commend my spirit,” says Jesus on the cross just before he dies. On the cross in Luke’s gospel, right before he dies, in the apex of his pain, and the precipice of his life, Jesus remembers who he is, he remembers whose he is and puts himself body and soul in the loving arms of God.

He prays, “Into your hands I commend my spirit,” the words of Psalm 31, words he would have said over and over again in his daily devotions and visits to the synagogue. In this desperate moment, filled with pain, riddled with grief He says these words and remembers God.

Prayer is every time we remember God. Prayer is every time we seek God, search for God, long for God, despise God, curse God, doubt God, all is prayer. The only thing that is not prayer is when we ignore God. When we think of only us, only you, only me, when we fail to remember, when we curtail our curiosity, preclude our speculation, or limit our longing for something more, than we have limited ourselves, to only here and only now and that is frequently not enough, and that is not prayer.

Prayer is remembering, that there is something more, the Holy that God call us all toward. For Jesus at the end of his earthly ministry, prayers are words lodged in the marrow of his bones, which rise in anguish, unbidden from his soul.

In the harsh world, this fearful time, let us remember-- let us pray. Let us not worry about the form or phrases of our prayers, let us not get lost in proper piety or right theology. Irish poet and monastic leader, Padric O Tuama, writes,

“Prayer is rhythm. Prayer is comfort, Prayer is disappointment. Prayer is words and shape and art around desperation, and delight, and disappointment and desire. ..No prayer is perfect. There is no system of prayer that is the best. There is only the person praying, the person kneeling, the person walking with beads between their fingers, the person cursing God, or gloom, or fate, (p xii Daily Prayer: With the Corrymeela Community.)

Henri Nouwen, theologian and spiritual director says, “The only way to pray is to pray, the only way to try is to try. So the only way to pray well is to pray regularly enough that it becomes a practice of encounter, (p. xii Daily Prayer: With the Corrymela Community.)

In this time of COVID, in this time of fear, isolation, loneliness and uncertainty, let us REMEMBER, let us pray, let us say in body, mind and soul, “Into your hands we commit our spirits,” O Holy One.

Amen.