

HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT IS SAYING

In Scripture and Prayer and The Great Cloud of Witnesses

Week of June 30, 2024

Collect for Proper 8

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.** BCP 230

2 Samuel 1:1, 17–27 NRSV, 1989

In our Hebrew scripture reading the report of Israel's devastating defeat by the Philistines at Mount Gilboa is brought to David at Ziklag. Saul and his three sons have been slain, including Jonathan. David might have been expected to show relief at the death of Saul, who had so relentlessly hunted him, but instead David grieves both publicly and privately. Israel has lost her king and finest prince to war, and David, who served Saul so long and loved Jonathan, is bereft. David's elegy was likely set to music, extolling Saul's heroism, Jonathan's might in battle, and the profound national and personal loss embodied in their deaths.

- 1 After the death of Saul, when David had returned from defeating the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag.
- 17 David intoned this lamentation over Saul and his son Jonathan.
- 18 (He ordered that The Song of the Bow be taught to the people of Judah; it is written in the Book of Jashar.) He said,
- 19 “Your glory, O Israel, lies slain upon your high places! How the mighty have fallen!
- 20 Tell it not in Gath; proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon, or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice; the daughters of the uncircumcised will exult.
- 21 You mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew or rain upon you nor bounteous fields! For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, anointed with oil no more.
- 22 From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, nor the sword of Saul return empty.
- 23 Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles; they were stronger than lions.
- 24 O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you with crimson, in luxury, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.
- 25 How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan lies slain upon your high places.
- 26 I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.
- 27 How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!”

Exploring 2 Samuel 1:1, 17–27

2 Samuel. At one time, the first and second books of Samuel formed a single book. They were separated in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures known as the Septuagint (about 250 BC). 1 Samuel begins with the story of Samuel: hence the name. 2 Samuel tells the story of David's rule, first as he gradually gained control of the whole of Judah (the south), and then when he was king of both Judah and Israel (the north.)

Exegetical Perspective

By Patricia K. Tull

The selected text for Proper 8, the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, concerns David's response to the deaths of his nemesis King Saul and his friend Jonathan, Saul's son. It follows two weeks in which David is introduced: Proper 6's story of David's anointing by the prophet Samuel, and the two alternatives for Proper 7, the story of his killing of Goliath in [1 Samuel 17](#) and the aftermath of that battle in his early relations with Saul and Jonathan in [1 Samuel 18](#).

The story of conflict between David and Saul that extends through the second half of 1 Samuel is missing from the lectionary readings, which jump immediately from David's introduction to the king and prince to their demise. [...] In brief, even though Saul has chosen David, he quickly becomes as unexplainably hostile to David as Jonathan is unexplainably drawn to him. The rest of Saul's story moves gradually but inexorably to his tragic death. Saul's attempt to kill David with his spear in [18:11](#) is only the first of many attempts, from putting him in harm's way against the Philistines to pursuing him personally in the wilderness of Judah. David flees the royal palace, leaving his wife Michal and friend Jonathan behind, and seeks refuge for his parents in the foreign country of Moab and asylum for himself among the enemy Philistines. For an unnamed number of years, in short, David becomes a renegade in (and out of) his own country, surviving by his wits and the kindness of others.

David twice finds himself in a position to kill his pursuer—first in En-gedi, when Saul goes into a cave without knowing that David and his men are already there ([1 Sam. 24:3](#)), and second in the Wilderness of Ziph, when David finds Saul and his entire army asleep ([1 Sam. 26:7](#)). He resists killing him, however, on the grounds that no one should harm “the LORD's anointed” ([1 Sam. 24:6; 26:9](#))—a point he makes to Saul both times ([1 Sam. 24:10; 26:23](#)). Such an understanding is not free of self-interest, or at least royal interest, since David himself had likewise been anointed. It does not mean that David opposes killing others, as his intended attack against Nabal in the story interposed between the two instances of sparing Saul demonstrates ([1 Sam. 25:21–22](#)). He does not even mind massacring unarmed settlements, including women ([1 Sam. 27:9–11](#)), while lying to his protectors about his activities.

The verses in 2 Samuel 1 that today's reading skips over testify that David does not mind slaying the young man who claims to have assisted Saul's suicide ([2 Sam. 1:2–16](#)). The fact that David is unaware that the man is lying (if we believe [1 Sam. 31:4](#)) does not remove the shock of his action. We might judge the Amalekite to have carefully weighed his options and measured his story, hoping with his signs of mourning and his tale of deference to the king's wishes to appear loyal to Saul but, with his offer of Saul's crown and armlet, to appear loyal to David. Like David himself, he is doing his best to stay alive—and even to benefit—in a

politically precarious world. However, he has not reckoned with the lopsidedness of David's scruples.

This narrative casts a shadow on David's lament over Saul, underscoring his zealous maintenance of his own innocence in relation to the king. He is not above a public relations campaign, as his message to the people of Jabesh-gilead shows ([2 Sam. 2:5–7](#)). When Abner, the disloyal general of Saul's son Ishbaal (Ishbosheth), offers to switch sides, David receives him gladly ([3:17–21](#)) and objects—once again, violently—only after two men actually carry out Ishbaal's assassination ([4:5–12](#)). Whatever we can say in David's favor about his scruples regarding Saul, we cannot deny that he is, as the unfortunate Shimei will later announce, “a man of blood” ([16:7–8](#)). Even 1 Chronicles, whose portrait of David is almost invariably favorable, attributes his inability to build the temple to his bloodshed ([1 Chr. 28:3](#)).

However, besides bloodshed, David's other talent is statesmanship. For striking just the right tone at the necessary moment he has perfect pitch. In his lament he expresses not his personal feelings toward Saul, whatever they may have been, but the appropriate farewell for a king who has, after all, died defending his country from foreign attack, for a king who has, after all, provided a measure of stability and prosperity to his subjects. Like a talented statesman, David marks the tragedy with words that ennoble its meaning. He resists sentimentally making more of his own ties with Saul than they were.

When it comes to Jonathan, though, David is more qualified to speak from somewhere closer to his heart, since no rupture ever occurred with his friend. In fact, the pathos of Jonathan's life was to remain staunchly loyal not only to his father, fighting the Philistines alongside him, but also to his friend, advocating David's innocence to his father on numerous occasions and never, so far as we know, letting himself be drawn into Saul's campaign against David. David acknowledges the love Jonathan has for him and the joy this love has brought him, and we have no reason to doubt his sincerity.

The first human being God made was of both dust and spirit—dust of earth and spirit of God ([Gen. 2:7](#)). If we expect of any human that they somehow supersede this mix of mortality and divinity, we expect too much. We know from our contemporary heroes that the more soaring are their talents, the more stunning are their flaws. The fissures in David's character were present from birth, but they became far more pronounced the longer he lived. One of the lessons of his story, as many readers have noted, is that if God could love and prosper David, there is saving hope also for the rest of mortally flawed humanity.

“Exegetical Perspective (2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27),” in *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Additional Essays, vol. 31, Feasting on the Word* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2012).

Psalm 130 NRSVue, 2021

A plea for mercy offered in patient hope to the faithful Lord.

- 1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.
- 2 Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!
- 3 If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?
- 4 But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

4

5 I wait for the LORD; my soul waits, and in his word I hope;
6 my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

7 O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.

8 It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

Exploring Psalm 130

Psalms is a collection of collections. The psalms were written over many centuries, stretching from the days of Solomon's temple (about 950 BC) to after the Exile (about 350 BC.) Psalms are of five types: hymns of praise, laments, thanksgiving psalms, royal psalms, and wisdom psalms. Within the book, there are five "books"; there is a doxology ("Blessed be ... Amen and Amen") at the end of each book.

Pastoral Perspective

By Mary Douglas Turner

Psalm 130 is labeled, along with Psalms 120–134, as “A Song of Ascents.” While we cannot be sure of their original uses, many scholars suggest that together they constitute a kind of songbook for pilgrims on their way “up” to the temple in Jerusalem (or up the fifteen steps from the Court of the Women to the Court of Israel in the temple itself), especially at the time of the harvest festivals prescribed in the Torah. The pilgrim journey was spiritual as well as geographical and required preparation in heart and mind for the encounter with YHWH, the king of heaven, in worship and sacrifice.

Centuries later, long after the temple had been destroyed, the Christian church grouped this psalm together with six others (Pss. [6](#), [32](#), [38](#), [51](#), [102](#), and [143](#)) as a different kind of devotional booklet, collectively known as the Penitential Psalms. By the medieval period, they had come into common use in the sacrament of penance. This was, of course, a similar sort of pilgrimage, from deep awareness of sinfulness to a sense of absolution and grace, again through an encounter with God. Throughout Christian history God’s people continued to use these Penitential Psalms as a pathway toward grace.

Hardly anyone will have much difficulty in calling to mind a time when the opening verses of this psalm could have been his or her own. We all have our own dark understanding of “the depths” in human life; the metaphor is visceral, the definition specific to some painful personal experience. Personal experience can broaden out into community understanding when shared: a bad season for farming or fishing, for instance, affects many others besides the actual fishers of the sea and tillers of the soil. The life of the community suffers at every level or in good seasons is buoyed by hope for the future. The psalmist’s community would have shared the image of the watery depths as a place of chaos, as in the beginning at the creation—a place from which God is essentially absent, a place to be feared. A cry to God from such a place is natural, perhaps desperate. Part of the preacher’s work here is to remind the listeners of their own depths without losing them there. God’s people have come to hear a word of solace and pardon in a world where hurt and blame abound. The joy of “hope in the Lord” shines the brighter when the shadows of grief, pain, or guilt are visible but not overwhelming.

Here the psalmist's cry is uttered in confidence that God will hear and respond: it is the prayer of a hopeful person more than one who is lost in despair. In calling out to God in [verses 1–4](#), the singer names her downcast state in terms so broad that they encompass the essence of the human condition. Whether the singer experiences the depths because of circumstances beyond her control or because of her own iniquities, she is caught in her humanity, needing God's help. Noting the overwhelming sinfulness of humankind, for which there is no excuse before the Lord, she affirms God's merciful nature in a subtle, indirect request for forgiveness and carefully includes a promise of the thankful reverence that is indeed God's due. The rather subservient tone of these verses springs from genuine humility and absolute trust in God.

Humility and trust, to say nothing of subservience, tend to be scarce among affluent Americans. We are generally sure of our own talents and strengths, proudly self-reliant as individuals and independent as congregations. Pushing our knowledge of the depths of the human condition to the back of our minds, we rarely see ourselves as pilgrims reaching out for an encounter with or a deeper knowledge of God. Likewise, the notion of waiting patiently for the Lord's forgiveness is foreign to people who rarely sit still but take on multiple tasks at once, whirling from one appointment or demand to the next without pause or reflection.

What does it mean, in contemporary culture, to wait for the Lord? The psalmist evokes an image of body and soul on tiptoe, breath held, tense with eagerness to greet the Lord, waiting like a sentry who searches the darkness of night for the first sign of dawn. We might see something of that eagerness in a family (especially the mother!) awaiting the impending birth of a child, or in a person who is in the process of discerning his vocation. Or how might a very elderly person or one who is extremely ill or dying await the coming encounter with God? In what word of God does such a person find hope? And for the majority of folk who may not see themselves in such a life situation, what reason can the preacher offer for the intensity of feeling found in this psalm?

If the first four verses are a prayer, the last four are a combination of creed and sermon. Verses 5–6 assert the hopeful waiting stance of the psalmist, whatever her reasons or life situation might be. In the final two lines, her eagerness to share her faith overflows in an exclamation exhorting the community to join her in hope. In the New Testament lection, Paul refers to psalms of this sort, where in the midst of troubles the psalmist's faith impels her to speak out: "But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—'I believed, and so I spoke'—we also believe, and so we speak" ([2 Cor. 4:13](#)).

This is a prophetic word, to Israel in the original setting, to the Corinthians in Paul's time, and to congregations in the twenty-first century. Can the eager, patient faith of one individual spur the community to look again at its beliefs and the life that arises out of them? One voice may indeed be sufficient to remind God's people of God's amazing "steadfast love" and of God's "great power to redeem." Whose voice speaks that word of hope? Whose ears need to hear it?

2 Corinthians 8:7-15 NRSVue, 2021

In this New Testament lesson the apostle Paul encourages the Corinthians to be generous in their contributions to a collection he has been gathering for the relief of the church in Jerusalem. It seems the Corinthians had begun to raise money for this cause in the previous year but have not completed the project despite the means available to them. In sharing from their abundance with those in need, these new disciples will be following in the way of the Lord Jesus who, though rich, became poor that the Corinthians might become rich.

- 7 Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.
- 8 I do not say this as a command, but I am, by mentioning the eagerness of others, testing the genuineness of your love.
- 9 For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.
- 10 And in this matter I am giving my opinion: it is beneficial for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something.
- 11 Now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means.
- 12 For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.
- 13 For I do not mean that there should be relief for others and hardship for you, but it is a question of equality between
- 14 your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may also supply your need, in order that there may be equality.
- 15 As it is written, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.”

Exploring 2 Corinthians 8:7-15

2 Corinthians. This is a letter, written in the style common in the first century AD. From the text, we know that Paul wrote it in Macedonia after leaving Ephesus, probably in the autumn of 57 AD. It gives us a picture of Paul the person: an affectionate man, hurt to the quick by misunderstandings and evil-doing of his beloved fellow Christians, yet happy when he can praise them. The letter's prime intent is to combat evils which have arisen in the Christian communities in the Achaian peninsula of Greece.

Theological Perspective

By Garrett Green excerpt

Our passage represents the heart of Paul’s appeal to the Corinthian Christians to fulfill their pledge to the collection for “the poor among the saints at Jerusalem” ([Rom. 15:26](#)), a project whose great importance to the apostle is evident also from his earlier remarks to the Corinthians ([1 Cor. 16:1–4](#)) and to the Galatians ([2:9–10](#)). But “collection” (*logeia*, a term he uses only in [1 Cor. 16:1, 2](#)), hardly captures the deeply theological significance of the enterprise, as shown by the other terms he uses to describe it in our passage and elsewhere: *charis*, “grace” ([2 Cor. 8:6, 7, 9](#); also in [1 Cor. 16:3](#)), *eulogia*, “blessing” ([9:5](#)), *leitourgia*, “priestly service” ([9:12](#)), and *koinōnia*, “fellowship,” “participation” ([8:4](#); also in [9:13](#)) as well as [Rom. 15:26](#)). In words just prior to our passage, he says that this “relief work”

(*diakonia*) is both a work of “grace” and an act of Christian “fellowship” (8:4), that is, a tangible gesture of gospel solidarity and love ([see 8:8](#)) between Gentiles and Jews.

The fuller theological significance of this relief effort becomes manifest in our passage as Paul’s appeal to the Corinthian church unfolds. Having held up before them the example of the Macedonian Christians ([8:1–5](#)), he now addresses the Corinthians directly. Rather than trying to arouse a sense of competition with other churches, Paul reminds them of their own qualities and accomplishments. Praising them for the excellence of their faith, speech, knowledge, and earnestness, he asks them to “excel in this [act of] grace also” (v. 7, my translation). The word “grace,” *charis*, is more central to this passage than might appear from the English. In verse 1 it is explicitly the grace of God given to the Macedonian churches; in verse 4 the same word is used for the “favor” (“privilege” in NRSV) of their including Paul and Titus in the collection project; and in [verses 6–7](#) it refers to the “act of grace” (ESV) or “generous undertaking” (NRSV) represented by the collection. For Paul these are all expressed in the one word *charis*, covering what we might call “grace” or “favor” or “thanks,” depending upon the English context. (Modern Greeks still express their thanks by saying *eucharisto*.) But gratitude cannot be compelled, and Paul assures them that his counsel is not a command but an appeal to show “that your love also is genuine” ([v. 8](#), my translation).

Only in the following verse, however, do we reach the real theological heart of Paul’s appeal: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (v. 9 RSV). Here we have not only a pithy summary of the gospel itself but also a description of what has been called “the economy of God,”^[1] a metaphor rooted in the New Testament (as in [Col. 1:25](#)) and developed extensively by the church fathers. The Greek word *oikonomia*, whose original meaning was “household” (cf. German *Haushalt*, “budget”), became a metaphor whose meaning extends from “economy” in our modern, fiscal sense of the word to God’s universal plan of salvation, the “divine economy.” But notice that Paul’s statement in [verse 9](#) encompasses both, since God’s saving act of grace in Jesus Christ is also the model for our “economics” as Christians.

[1] Francis Young and David F. Ford, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1987), 169–71..

Mark 5:21-43 NRSVue, 2021

The gospel tells of the healings of a woman with hemorrhages and of the daughter of Jairus, an official of the local synagogue. Here are two remarkable stories of healing, one told within the other. As Jesus is responding to Jairus’s plea for his sick daughter, a woman who has suffered with hemorrhage for twelve years reaches out in faith, and is healed and given new life. By the time Jesus reaches Jairus’s house, the twelve-year-old daughter is seemingly dead, but Jesus raises her to new life.

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him, and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue, named Jairus, came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and pleaded with him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live.” So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had, and she was no better but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, “If I but touch his cloak, I will be made well.” Immediately her flow of blood stopped, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my cloak?” And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

While he was still speaking, some people came from the synagogue leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?” But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the synagogue leader, “Do not be afraid; only believe.” He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the synagogue leader’s house, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. Taking her by the hand, he said to her, “*Talitha koum,*” which means, “Little girl, get up!” And immediately the girl stood up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this and told them to give her something to eat.

Exploring Mark 5:21-43

Mark. As witnesses to the events of Jesus life and death became old and died, the need arose for a written synopsis. Tradition has it that Mark, while in Rome, wrote down what Peter remembered. This book stresses the crucifixion and resurrection as keys to understanding who Jesus was. When other synoptic gospels were written, i.e. Matthew and Luke, they used the Gospel according to Mark as a source. Mark is most probably the John Mark mentioned in Acts 12:12: his mother's house was a meeting place for believers.

Reaching Out

by Brad Roth

In the olden days of my youth, I was a hay-baling farmboy. It went like this: My brothers and I would balance on a heaving flat wagon hitched behind a hay baler pulled by an old green tractor. We trundled through the field while the baler swept up a swath of cut alfalfa in front, compressed it into large rectangles with some huffing and thudding, and then pushed the bales out the rear shoot. When the bales reached the tipping point on the shoot, we would reach across the gap between baler and wagon, gaff them with antique metal hooks, and drag them onto the hay rack, where we stacked them like an Aztec pyramid. It was all a little precarious.

The Gospel of Mark tells the story of a precarious moment when a woman reaches out. It’s a healing story nested inside a story of resurrection. On his way to raise Jairus’s daughter, Jesus is shadowed by a woman who has “been suffering from hemorrhages for

twelve years.” Doctors haven’t helped her. She is at the end of her rope, but she has “heard about Jesus,” and in the thick of the crowd she dares to reach out and take hold of his cloak.

The healing happens so quietly. Something untwists, and she knows it. Jesus knows it. What’s more, the gospel writer gives us a subtle clue that Jesus knows who it is who has touched him. Jesus “looked all around to see who had done it,” and as Joel Marcus points out in the Anchor Bible Commentary, that Greek who is feminine singular. But the disciples and the crowd are oblivious: “How can you say ‘who touched me?’” Jesus not only heals the woman but also sees her. The account ends on a tender note when Jesus says, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

It’s easy to get turned around on the meaning of Jesus’ words “your faith has made you well.” Sometimes, this and other passages like it have been used to blame a person who is suffering when their prayers feel unanswered. If you only had more faith.

But faith comes in more than one form.

Sometimes, faith is a solid thing. We take refuge in God and stand on the only foundation that matters ([1 Cor. 2:5, 3:11](#)). I experience that live-and-move-and-have-our-being faith as daily life shaped by Christ ([Acts 17:28](#)). It’s sustaining and quiet and stable, just who I am and what I do.

But I’ve lived another kind of faith too, a faith in which I reach out and take hold of Jesus however I can—not an arm or a fistful of robe but just the barest little knot of tassel on the corner of his cloak. This sort of faith isn’t entirely explainable—not because it’s ridiculous, an impossible abstraction, but because in faith we’re responding to an overture that we don’t entirely understand from a place that is often heaving and doing something strange in us. There’s no knowing Zen smile in faith like this. We don’t have it together, and our stomachs are knotted up like a wet dish rag. We’ve been bleeding for years. But there he is in the crowd. So.

Ministry has felt like this to me—a stretching through to something, someone, both bright and dark. I’m living [Mark 5:27](#) on everlasting loop: hearing Jesus, coming to Jesus, touching Jesus. Christian faith feels like this. We reach out, and Jesus takes hold of us.

Essay in "Sunday's Coming Premium" email dated June 24, 2024 from [The Christian Century](#)

Bibliographical and Contributor Information

Unless otherwise noted, the Introductions to the readings come from *Introducing the Lessons of the Church Year, Third Edition* by Frederick Borsch, and George Woodward. (New York; Harrisburg, PA; Denver: Morehouse Publishing, 2009).

Bible verses are from: *New Revised Standard Version: Updated Edition*. Friendship Press, 2021, unless otherwise noted.

[Book Outlines](#) are from [Commentaries on the Revised Common Lectionary](#) website maintained by the Anglican Diocese of Montreal.

Unless otherwise noted, the commentaries are from: David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds. *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year B. Vol. 3*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

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Odds & Ends

Healing Within Healing

by Suzanne Guthrie

How is it that each time I am healed (and in the overall ongoing process of healing) a spiritual gift seems imminent? I don't believe that illness is "caused" by some defect in character or sin or is inflicted upon you for some message you're supposed to get. But I can't help noticing the spiritual component that comes with healing. Maybe because I'm trained to watch for the movement of the spirit I see grace mending the emotional chasm left by illness. Maybe it's because I consciously practice gratitude, which is like wearing a pair of corrective glasses (and not rose-colored ones, in case that's what you're thinking. Gratitude, a subtle and sometimes painful and exacting teacher, pries opens consciousness. Try it.)

But maybe I'm attuned to the gift that comes with healing because each time I've been healed I have received a gift, and the more horrible the trauma, the greater the gift. I'm almost afraid to write this, as if it is some dangerous, cosmic secret.

A woman holding her child for the first time after the horror of childbirth knows this cosmic secret. *That* pain brought forth *this* love.

The older woman with the hemorrhage is untouchable in her culture because of her flow of blood. The girl dies before she's fertile. The woman reaches for Jesus and is healed. Jesus touches the girl and wakes her from mortal sleep. Isolated by their illness, they are again joined with their loved ones. Jesus not only heals but restores the two women in the Gospel story to the ability to bring forth life.

A healing occurs within my healing. Creative and generative, I am my old self with new grace infused where pain once hollowed me out. Like that dangerous and cosmic secret, the crucifixion, *that* pain brought forth *this* love.

["Suzanne's Meditation" for Proper 8B](#) on [At the Edge of the Enclosure](#) website