

At God's Table
September 1, 2013
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God talks with us. God walks with us.

But because God is so big, it's sometimes difficult to notice God's there at all, right?

We find ourselves walking along a trail---no other people around---

---surrounded by nothing but a quiet wind blowing through the aspen leaves,

And as we're moving along down that dirt path,

we sometimes fool ourselves into thinking we're alone,

...But the greater life of God is all around us as we move.

In that air. In that quiet.

... as our feet move one step at a time toward wherever we're going.

And all the while, it holds us. All the while it carries us where we'll go.

All the while it gives us the breath we need to move, and to think, and to feel.

...But we have a tendency to get caught up in all of the smaller stuff, right?

And we forget about that friend who's traveled so long by our side.

Our scripture readings from the lectionary this week bring us to these thoughts.

And I'll tell ya, they were tough words to read,

because they applied far too easily to my own experiences over the past few weeks.

We've got a few for today: one, from Psalm 81, and another from Jeremiah,

which isn't listed in our bulletin.

Both of these talk about these ways we forget.

The ways we so often fall back on this feeling of being alone,

And believe we struggle, by ourselves, to move where we hope to go...

...losing our sense of God's company, and as a result,

not reaching out to that very life that fills us up,

for the support and guidance we need as we walk.

From Psalm 81, the Psalmist cries out,

Sing aloud to God our strength; shout for joy to the God of Jacob.

Then he goes on to express the thoughts of God. ...From Verse 10:

10 I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide and I will fill it. 11 "But my people did not listen to my voice... 13 O that my people would listen to me... 16 I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."

Then from Jeremiah, Chapter 2... and this was the one that rang even louder:

4 Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. 5 Thus says the LORD: What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthless things...6 They did not say, "Where is the LORD who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that no one passes through, where no one lives?" 7 I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. But [in times of trouble] the priests did not say, "Where is the LORD?" Those who handle the law did not know me... 11 Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for something that does not profit. ...They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.

These passages---they say so much, but they don't ask a lot.

Only something very simple from us. Something beautiful. Something soothing.

What they ask of us is, when we're feeling down...When we're feeling low...

...When we're feeling confused, and don't know where to go from where we are,
To look up. To look *out* from ourselves.

To remember God, and to seek God's help. God's love. God's guidance.

Which is always warmly and freely given.

(Ask and you will receive. Knock and the door will be opened....)

And they also express a frustration, right?

From God---from the very life that fills us and surrounds us...

...that we don't sooner think to *go* to God.

And in not thinking to go to God---who's brought us this far,

and will be the only One to bring us where we'll go---

We're reflecting from our souls a kind of lacking trust. A missing faith.

A faded memory of all that God's done in our lives

to carry us to where we stand now, in this very moment.

And of course, when reading from these pages, it's always good to engage.

To wonder. To think.

And I found myself wondering, why frustration?

Why might God be frustrated when this happens inside of us?

And I was reminded of something from when I was just a little kid.

One of my best friends, lived next door with her brother, and though he was just small,
she was a several years older, so their parents left her in charge of him

while they were at work, over the summer.

Their mom didn't like them drinking too much soda,

and so to keep her littlest one from the getting too hopped up on High Fructose Corn syrup,

She'd place the big bottle of soda on the top shelf, where he couldn't reach it,

and would leave just *one* of those smaller bottles on the bottom

for him to drink before she got home.

Well, of course. This wasn't enough.

So my friend's little brother came up to her one day, and asked for her help.

He needed more Dr. Pepper.

Feeling a stir of compassion in her soul, she agreed to do him the favor.

"I'll fill it back up for you, when it's empty," she promised him.

"But how will you know? What if I finish it and you're not around to see?" He asked.

"Don't worry," she assured him. Then she unscrewed the smaller bottle and pointed

to that thin, almost transparent little blue plastic lining under the cap.

"See this?" She asked. "That's a magical sensor.

And when the bottle's running low, it lets me know.

...And when it's empty, I'll come fill it up for you."

The little boy was at first doubtful, but he gave in,

hesitantly trusting what his sister said was true, and that he'd find more soda when he ran out.

And so he did it. He'd place the almost empty bottle back in the fridge,

And my friend would go by and check, while we played.

And each time she saw it was low, she'd reach up to that shelf he couldn't reach himself,

And pour more in the bottle.

And I'll tell ya, the first time he opened that door and found that bottle full, that little kid looked like one of those people from those old Publisher's Clearing House commercials being handed that gigantic check. He was overjoyed. Jumping up and down.

"Look! Look! It's full again! It worked! It's full!"

And he'd run off with that fresh, cold soda, completely overtaken with wonder in having all of that corn syrup all to himself.

And I remember it made my friend happy, too.

Each time he'd open that refrigerator door, just as much joy filled her own smile, watching his reaction. ...Eventually, things changed, though.

As the summer went on, her little brother started showing it to all of his friends.

He'd point to that clear blue lining inside the cap, and go on and on about this magical sensor.

He started forgetting all about the fact, that it was his *sister* who filled it up, not that plastic lining.

He started showing off---like that sensor somehow made *him* special.

That he was cooler than the rest of them,

because he owned this thing, that made this spectacular miracle happen, each time.

When he'd take it out of the fridge, the joy he used to show became cockiness.

And I remember the disappointment in her face coming, instead of the smile.

The little kid never thanked her for filling it back up for her. Didn't acknowledge her at all...

Though she knew he *knew* and should *remember* that it was her doing it for him all the while.

So, she started doing it less and less.

“If he thinks he’s doing it on his own, let him,” she’d grumble.

And when her little brother went back to the fridge,

and found it hadn’t been filled as soon as he wanted,

He’d get angry. Grumble. Flail his arms in the air.

But not once, through all of those later summer days, did he ever go to ask his *sister* why.

He didn’t once go back to her, and ask her to fill it again...

...focusing more on the fact that his miracle seal must be broken,

Than the fact that it had been his sister all the while, and all he needed to do was go to her,

acknowledge what she’d done for him, and ask her to do it again.

And seriously, I think that’s all it would have taken for that magic seal

to start making more corn syrup again.

With all of that joy she showed in watching him become so happy,

I’m sure she would’ve picked right back up with it again.

Instead, he spent the rest of that time before school started again,

watching his bottle empty, and complaining about his mom’s unfair rules.

And I was so glad God filled my mind with this memory,

because it’s so much like what we experience with God’s Spirit as we live. As we struggle.

We seek God’s help, in trust. We follow where God tells us,

But so soon we get all caught up in what we're doing.

We start imagining whatever ease in life we're experiencing, is happening

because of something special about *us*, and what *we* do, and what *we* have.

Forgetting that it's been God---that bigger Life around us, carrying us, all the while.

And even refusing to go to God, when we feel that comfort inevitably empty from our lives.

Forgetting about God so completely as we get caught up in the small stuff,

That we don't even think to ask....

As we wrongly rely on the cracked cisterns of our ego and pride to provide for us,

Through the days of our lives.

...And I think that's the frustration these passages from Psalms and Jeremiah show us in the heart of God.

But they also show an eagerness in God's soul to reconnect with us,

even after we've broken away. ...And I can't fully explain why,

But I think it has something to do with that sister's smile,

when she saw the joy in that little boy's face.

The connection between us and God, is strong,

and I believe that God shares in our joy, and shares in our sorrows,

Feeling all of each of us in every moment. Glad to be a part of us.

Remember the Psalm:

"Open your mouth wide and I will fill it." [Says the Lord]]16 I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."

God just asks us to remember.

To look to God, who's brought everything we know to our lives,

And to ask God to fill us up again, when we feel empty.

And I'll tell ya, God does it. And it doesn't take too long.

Might sound kind of presumptuous to say that so boldly, but in my own experiences,

I know this to be true... Even though it still startles me *every* time.

Remember I was telling you that when I read that scripture, it spoke so loudly

to what I was experiencing myself, at the time.

Before we close up, I have to admit to you that over the last few weeks,

I've been under a tremendous amount of stress,

Trying to get something done, and having all of these hopes and expectations

about what will happen with it, in the future.

Started getting all caught up in the head about it.

Spent a lot of time whining about it on the couch, with Ky.

And in all of this, I'd become so trapped up in myself, and what *I* could do,

and what *should* be happening,

That I started just feeling really alone. Stuck, inside.

And not once, did I reach out from that place.

Not once did I go to God, even though it had everything to do with God.

Not once did I lift my eyes. Or raise my voice to speak into the quiet.

And after I read those passages,

I'd almost felt like God splashed me in the face with glass of cold divine water.

It was enough to make me get up from my chair, and kneel down on the floor.

In that moment, I reached out from myself. In the dark behind my eyelids,

I finally went to God. Talked to God about what I was feeling.

I said to God that I needed God's help.

To know where to go from here, because I couldn't see on my own.

And then this happened.

And I'm telling you this is in one hundred percent truth---no exaggeration.

Not five minutes after standing up from the floor,

my face still pink with all the blood from kneeling down,

My phone rang. It was a call I'd waited a long time to hear.

It was, in fact, exactly what I needed to hear in that moment.

The problems I'd worried over weren't solved by the conversation.

The message of Jeremiah isn't about no longer experiencing trouble in life.

But the very support I needed to keep me going

rang through my ears from that voice I hadn't heard in so long,

And all of that emptiness I felt inside

while struggling to deal with the situation, was filled up.

And my face and my heart lifted with joy. And I remembered that I wasn't alone.

I remembered that it's been God's support holding me up all the while,

and that that support never goes away,

but waits always for a chance to wrap around our lives.

And I thanked God for what just happened.

I remembered God, and remembered that,
just like those seats at that table Jesus talked about in Luke,
We should trust in God to take us where we'll go.
That we should walk up to the table humbly,
without imagining ourselves larger than we are,
And let ourselves be low and know it's God who takes you from that low place,
and places you high.

I know there's not a single person in this room who hasn't found themselves someplace low.

Many of us are there, right now.

And if not now, we will be, later. Because that's just the way things go.

But when you do find yourself there. Remember to look up.

Remember God. Talk to God and let God talk to you.

Let God fill you up, remembering that we don't know where we're going,
but we know where we've been.

And we know God brought us there, and that God will bring us wherever we will go,

Loving us and supporting us through each bump and turn on the path in front of us.

Smiling at our smile,

and just waiting for us to open our mouths wide so that we may be filled.

Amen.