

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

I would like to share with you a story by an anonymous author.

A young student, was one day taking a walk with a professor. As they went along, they saw lying in the path a pair of old shoes, which they supposed to belong to a poor man who was employed in a field close by, and who had nearly finished his day's work. The student turned to the professor, saying: "Let us play a trick: we will hide his shoes, and conceal ourselves behind those bushes, and wait to see his perplexity when he cannot find them."

"My friend" answered the professor, "we should never amuse ourselves at the expense of the poor. But you are rich, and may give yourself a much greater pleasure by means of the poor man. Put a coin into each shoe, and then we will hide ourselves and watch how the discovery affects him." The student did so, and they both placed themselves behind the bushes close by.

The poor man soon finished his work, and came across the field to the path where he had left his coat and shoes. While putting on his coat he slipped his foot into one of his shoes; but feeling something hard, he stooped down to feel what it was, and found the coin. Astonishment and wonder were seen upon his countenance. He gazed upon the coin, turned it round, and looked at it again and again. He then looked around him on all sides, but no person was to be seen. He now put the money into his pocket, and proceeded to put on the other shoe; but his surprise was doubled on finding the other coin. His feelings overcame him; he fell upon his knees, looked up to heaven and uttered a loud fervent thanksgiving, in which he spoke of his wife, sick and helpless, and his children without bread, whom the timely bounty, from some unknown hand, would save from perishing.

The student stood there deeply affected, and his eyes filled with tears. "Now," said the professor, "are you not much better pleased than if you had played your intended trick?" The youth replied, "You have taught me a lesson which I will never forget."

The lesson readings that we just heard talk about the low points in our life of being without money and feelings of hopelessness and wondering what tomorrow may bring; the readings also provides us with hope and the promises that God will bring to us.

We are familiar with Job and his travails. Job is in the midst of a "dark night of the soul", a place that most of us have visited in our journeys. In sickness or grief, we have been where Job is at: "If I go forward, he is not there; or backward, I cannot perceive him; on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him; I turn to the right, but I cannot see him....if only could vanish in darkness, and thick darkness would cover my face." In fact, when I was young, I can recall pulling the covers over my face, thinking that somehow I would feel better.

In Hebrews, we are given the hope that there is a remedy for our despair. "For we do not have a great High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in

every respect has been tested as we are...". "... [there] we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

The highs and lows of life. And, again, all of us have stood on the mountains and see everything clearly and then, the next day, have found ourselves in a deep abyss and see only darkness. Personal illnesses can turn our world upside down; one moment we are in control, vertical, and sound of mind; and then suddenly we find ourselves dependent on others and horizontal and feel like we have misplaced our mind. The longest wait that we ever experience is sitting with a family member or friend who is taking the last leg of their earthly journey. Time seems to move so slowly with no evidence of ever ending. And then there are those nights when we wake up at 1:00 am and revisit every word of every conversation we had during the day and wishing that we had said more or said less and then glancing at the clock and wonder why now it is only 1:30 am and not later.

And God is always watching over us and posing the question: "You haven't found the coin yet, have you?" Be patient.

Our Adult Education group is in the process of reading Tish Harrison Warren's book, Liturgy of the Ordinary. To quote the description, "in overlooked moments and routines, we can become aware of God's presence in surprising ways. God is near!" One of the chapters is entitled, "Sitting in Traffic", and she reminds the reader that Christians are people who wait. "Christ has come and He will come again. We wait".

Rev. Warren tells the story of her friend Jan who has suffered with recurring cancer and other illnesses. "She's been shaped through waiting – waiting for a call from the doctor, for test results to come back, for another treatment, for healing, for she's not sure what." Jan's house is filled with paintings but there is one in particular that drew Tish Warren's interest. She describes it as "abstract, luminous, and intricately textured, and there was a keyhole etched on the canvas. Standing before it I felt like I was standing before an unearthly, mysterious door. Turning to Jan I said, "I want to see what's on the other side of the door." Jan smiled and said "Good! That's exactly how I want you to feel." The painting is called "The Gift". Jan explained that she wanted the viewer to have that stretching sense of waiting, of not being able to glimpse what was on the other side, suspended in a posture of expectation and uncertainty. Jan looked at me and said, "I always felt like I was waiting for the gift. But I've come to see that the waiting is the gift."

Jan knew what it was like to wait patiently, believing that God's timing is perfect and that, mysteriously, there is more happening while we wait than just waiting. Finding a coin in an old shoe, unlocking answers to questions in the early morning darkness, holding hands with a loved one for the last time as they "journey into the ultimate solitude", having someone to care for us in our hours of sickness.

There is a name for these activities: stewardship. Stewardship is about providing funds for church but that is only one small piece of it; putting coins in the bottom of shoes; listening to and sharing with the lost; rescuing and caring for our homeless four legged friends; being in the presence of and comforting the sick; feeding the hungry; caring for the natural world and ensuring that it continues to bring us shade and ever-changing colors; and listening to or telling a story that was meant just for that place and time and knowing that that moment is sacred.

Rob Bell, in his wonderful book, Love Wins, reminds us that “this participation is important, because Jesus and the prophets lived with an awareness that God has been looking for partners since the beginning, people who will take seriously their divine responsibility to care for the earth and each other in loving, sustainable ways. [Our hopes are centered] in the God who simply does not give up on creation and the people who inhabit it.”

Let us pray. [Prayer of the Farm Workers – Cesar Chavez]

Show me the suffering of the most miserable;

So I will know my people’s plight.

Free me to pray for others;

For you are present in every person.

Help me to take responsibility for my own life;

So that I can be free at last.

Grant me courage to serve others;

For in service there is true life.

Give me honesty and patience;

So that I can work with other workers.

Bring forth song and celebration;

So that the spirit will be alive among us.

Let the spirit flourish and grow;

So we will never tire of the struggle.

Let us remember those who have died for justice;

For they have given us life.

Help us love even those who hate us;

So we can change the world.

Amen