

Jan Hus Presbyterian Church & Neighborhood House
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Spirit, Revelation, and an Enlightened Heart: Priceless
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This morning's Unison Prayer was written by a friend of mine, Hillary Tucker. Hillary is a member of South Church in Dobbs Ferry, a congregation dedicated to the gospel and social justice – in much the same way as we are.

She starts out:

“The mystery of your presence is everywhere,
Everywhere we go, you are there.”

One thing I think of when I read this is:

“Wherever I go, I bring myself!”

Often, that is the problem. Bringing myself with me!

The time when that is most a problem is when I let my expectations get ahead of me. Once that happens, a lot of other emotions and responses are set into motion.

Hillary lays out a solution to such dilemmas:

Remind us to be the witnesses,
to allow,
to bask in the delights
of not calling the shots,
of not knowing, not doing,
but receiving the constant flow of your grace--
like the birds that offer their songs,
without prompts;
like the birthing woman,
riding the waves of her own body,

without command.
Let us too know the joys of giving
simply because we are able to.
Make us your empty vessels.

Be the witnesses, allow things to unfold...

And, prepare to be surprised in wonderful ways...

I have a feeling that the early disciples knew all about this, struggled with it, learned it, practiced with it, struggled...

Paul's letter to the church of Ephesus is most like an example of a circular letter, that is a letter that was written and then circulated among the churches, changing the salutation. In this case, there is some evidence that it might have been based on an earlier letter of Paul and written by one of his followers. The "circulation" of information by letters, the "YouTube" of the day - gives us a glimpse into this growing movement of followers of the gospels, which were still unfolding – being revealed.

And like today, I have to believe that these women and men who preached and witnessed were at their best when they did just that – followed the teachings (that is to say – practiced the teachings)...and left the rest in God's hands.

And when they did that, and left themselves and their work in God's hands, the outcome frequently set them back on their heels in wonder...that's what I heard when I read Paul's message this morning...and that's what happened to me.

There is no mistaking the excitement and enthusiasm of this writer in talking about Jesus and God and all the work that has gone into years of carrying the message and knowing of others doing the same...

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints [here, referring to the community and the followers] and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.

He might as well have just said...

Yes!

Not only is he writing to exhort and encourage this community, he is writing out of affirmation – that, indeed, God is and is doing amazing things in this world.

The prose and promise of this writer are stunning to me:

I pray that God may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation
as you come to know God...

The journey toward God will fill you (us) with wisdom and revelation...
you – inside will find the wisdom and the unfolding, the revelation of
God...

And the reason for such wisdom and revelation?

So that with the eyes of your heart enlightened...
the eyes of your heart enlightened
you may know what is the hope to which God has called you
...what are the riches of God's glorious inheritance
...what is the immeasurable greatness of God's power for us
who believe

This is far from self-help...

This is an enthusiastic, near-gushing, thrilled writer who is
encouraging the faithful to keep going, because if they haven't
already discovered such things...that is, such a God, they soon will.

This is not language about knowable things of their own. This is
Hillary and this is five other women I was with earlier in the week.

This is real.

Each of the women were mother's of children who were surviving
different cancers,as a result of the care and treatment of many

professionals, which these women gratefully acknowledged...but there was more...

Each of these women attributed the progress of their children to their faith in God. As we sat in our circle, each one witnessed much like today's author of Ephesians. I am happy that I have learned better not to squirm when worship sometimes turns to the high energy of response and call and praise...

Because I was able to just be with them and not be distracted by form as they witnessed and shared the power of their beliefs...

Still, in moderating the prayer group, I asked them about other families who had lost a child...families they knew and had sat in that same room with, praying and hoping for the outcomes they enjoyed...I asked what "praise" and "faith" looks like when the young person leaves us...

I didn't know what to expect...

Their response was to acknowledge the sadness of losing a child and acknowledging how grateful they were to have their child, but these mothers were also prepared to praise God even in loss.

They had moved well beyond expectations, and they had received wisdom and revelation that, indeed, had enlightened the eyes of their heart. So much so, that when we closed and I invited them to say the closing prayers, as we held hands and prayed, I thought to myself, God, if you were going to take me anytime soon, please take me now in the presence of these women...so powerful was the presence of God they brought with them.

The early disciples, living their lives immersed in this work, witnessing the presence of God at work, asking much the same things that Francis of Assisi would ask for eleven centuries later in his well known prayer: "Lord make me an instrument of thy peace..."

Not lack of way peace, "Peace" of God...peace: my peace I give you, my peace I leave you peace...

And, the writer continues:

God put this power to work in Christ...
Christ: the fullness of him who fills all in all

The power of God in Christ, the same power of God that you may know in other leaders of your traditions, if different than Christianity...

This is all in all – the power of God is the all in all

And more...

And the disciples, the writers, all those who carried the message, the Good News, who passed it on...this had a beginning for them...a beginning that would also be the end...the alpha and omega: Jesus.

In Luke this morning, with the precision of the surgeon he was believed to be, we have an appearance of Jesus, his Presence in their midst in some way, filling them with the same wisdom, enlightenment, revelation of Hillary, the women of our prayer circle, you, me, and all who listen in some way to God...

"Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written,

[as you have seen]

that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations,

[God is near – the distance has been removed]

beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

[Just as we are witnesses of such things.]

And see, I am sending upon you what God has promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

[Let go of your expectation and let God come upon you as God will]

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy

He withdrew from him and was carried away
And they worshipped him [for he was not gone, he was still with them]
And returned to Jerusalem with great joy [for his presence was with them]

As his presence is today.

Yes, priceless

And free...