All is Ground

Crisely Melecio-Zambrano  
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Texts:  
 1 Kings 19:9a, 11-13a  
 Matthew 14:22-33

Good morning loving community! It’s a joy to be with you. Gracias a Videlbina for the children’s teaching.

These readings are so rich! Although they are stories I’ve heard time and time again, they struck a deep chord this time around. Jesus’ steadiness in unsteady waters, Peter’s aliveness, Elijah’s listening.

As I was preparing for our time together, song after song kept floating through my head in response to these readings, so I thought I’d bring you with me on that sung journey.

The first song I’d like to share with you was taught to me by my dear sister in law, Katerina, named Blessed Motion by Annie Zylstra. The story behind the words were inspired by a quote of someone after experiencing a large earthquake.

I believed in solid ground  
Until I saw the earth in motion  
In the winds of steady change  
And in the ever rolling ocean

*\*for those reading a link to a video of this song:* [Blessed Motion (Annie Zylstra cover)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4cuH3PQCtkU)

Jesus gives us this phenomenal embodied example of how possible it is to find the ground in God within us while the outside circumstances of our lives might be waves rolling all around us. And perhaps like Peter, all of us are simply practicing to find that steadiness.

We all have times where life changes, we learn news that seems to tear the ground from underneath our feet, trauma, loss of a loved one, sickness, an unexpected fall, even sometimes with a seemingly positive change like a new relationship, the addition of a family member, retirement. If our God is a circumstantial God, only there when things are good, steady, balanced, then all is lost and we are left untethered drifting off into an endless sea. (How many of us haven’t experienced this doubt in the face of deep loss. Mary mentioned this experience just a couple of weeks ago). If our God is a God who is right here, who accompanies us, who exists in the very rolls, in the whisper, then all is ground.

I think of the rolling ocean of climate change. The very ground is changing beneath our feet. The things we took as solid, as givens, are quite literally melting and shifting. And if God is with us, what does this mean? How does that affect our response? How does that affect how we live right now?

It does not mean we don’t make space for all of the emotions that our new reality brings, for grieving because if we don’t make that space, then we can’t walk on the water, we will turn to stone, lose our breath and lose our point of focus, our spot.

Where is that spot? Like a dancer doing turns or a gymnast on a beam. Like a clearing in a dense forest. Have you ever tried to stay balanced with your eyes closed?

What helps us to stay connected to that spot?

How do we listen like Elijah and stay attentive to the places we can know God and stay connected to what is true?

Now I’ve never gotten along with Peter. I get the sense that the two of us wouldn’t be friends. But I’ve got to give him credit for being bold enough to ask to go out on the ocean.

It’s easy to imagine myself on the boat with the other disciples saying “What the heck is happening.” Jesus was Peter's spot. I can make sense of it when I think about how in love Peter and the other disciples were with Jesus. They had never experienced that kind of steadiness in a person and in such uncertain times. And so of course you’d want to run out to him. When I think of that steadiness, I want to run out to it, too. Take comfort in it.

In Resmaa Mennakem’s book *My Grandmother’s Hands*, he mentions that the most important part of the therapeutic relationship and why people keep coming back is that they want to be in the presence of someone who is regulated because it’s literally contagious. If we are in a parasympathetic state it can literally change the person next to us.

It’s like Etty Hillesum’s quote:

Ultimately, we have just one moral duty: to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves, more and more peace, and to reflect it toward others. And the more peace there is in us, the more peace there will also be in our troubled world.

If I am settled, have a steady spot on God, then I am going to make decisions from that place, I am going to relate to others from that place, I’ll have the presence to see others to see creation. Something like the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki are only possible when we are disconnected from ourselves. So imagine if we were connected, settled, regulated.

Like our psalm (85) from today says:

Kindness and truth shall meet;  
justice and peace shall kiss.  
Truth shall spring out of the earth,  
and justice shall look down from heaven.

*You beckon me to follow you into the sea of the unknown*

When we stop breathing, resist our current reality, we sink and experience the pain of holding what isn’t ours to hold, at times those spaces that might trigger that flight, fight, freeze response. I experienced this in a small way just a couple nights ago. I’m sure we’ve all felt it in some way. That “I don’t want to be where I am” moment. I was nursing Mariela to bed, as I do every night, but she is currently going through a big growth spurt and so didn’t stop nursing for over an hour. I was feeling totally drained and was unpleasantly surprised by a feeling of violence emerge from a place of needing to protect myself. Just wanting to run out of the room and be anywhere else. Once I noticed I was able to pause and remember my freedom. No one was forcing me to be here, I had the choice and what did I want to do in that moment. This didn’t mean it was smooth and neatly wrapped in a bow, I still felt residual effects, but I did feel release from the sudden hardness. I was able to sing her to sleep and eventually step out of the room and eat a snack and take some deep breaths.

*Let nothing disturb you, let nothing afright you, all things are passing, God never changes.*

We hear so many mystics in many traditions speak to this reality of constant change. Non-attachment as the Buddhist would say or Ignatian indifference as it is referred to in the Jesuit world. It does not mean we don’t care, on the contrary it is an invitation to love and respond deeply, finding the ground within us rather than depending on sickness or health, happy days or sad days, whatever we deem as positive or negative aspects of our lives.

Jesus refuses to play into the dualistic binaries we as humans are so prone to: good/bad, hurt or be hurt, violence responds with violence, fear responds with fear. Jesus surprises us by keeping eyes fixed on his Abba in love and responding from that place.

So, what stays true? When all else is stripped away and all that's left is that still small voice, that whisper, what is left? I wonder if there is a secret intimate song there for each of us speaking directly to our innermost being to all those parts of ourselves that are in need of healing and love, to all those parts that are radiant and ready to sing back at recognizing the reflection of themselves in the Creator, deep calling out to deep.

We need to reckon and wrestle with who God is to us. Matthias mentioned the Sanskrit word Samsara last week, the cycle of life and death. Is God only in new life or can God also be found in moments of death? Let us get to know God and learn to recognize more and more that whisper constantly calling out to us in the waves.

So, I want to finish how we started if you would please sing with me:

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Until I saw the earth in motion  
In the winds of steady change  
And in the ever rolling ocean