Extravagant Abundance

Jennie Gosché
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Texts:
 Philippians 4: 4-7
 Psalm 84: 8-12

You can watch Jennie’s teaching on this [Zoom recording](https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/rqHTt_WQlPnReEldb4Jhr-A4jHPtXtC3p_TKMlBS7jLCTEFIoK-sMPhzHieQvYFO.GKHO6yj3_3Jccvbc?startTime=1666535256000).

I would like to open with prayer: Thank you, thank you, thank you Lord for being always present with us. Please hold us in your Light and Love. Amen

Recently Robin Wall Kimmerer, author of *Braiding Sweetgrass*, was named a MacArthur fellow for her work as a botanist and writer and as an Indigenous oracle. Kimmerer is a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. In *Braiding Sweetgrass* she weaves together the elders’ wisdom, her research on plants, and her experiences as a mother, grandmother, and tenured professor at the State University of New York’s College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse. She is also founder and director of its Center for Native Peoples and the Environment. Kimmerer says, “in return for these spectacular gifts of the Earth, say to yourself: ‘What is my accountability in return for everything I’ve been given?’” She calls us all to “honor the Earth’s glories. She invites us to learn from plants and other species, natures’ teachers.” Her book is a collective “call to action on climate urgency.”

As a member of the New Creation mission group, I first read *Braiding Sweetgrass.* Our mission group offers quarterly contemplative services at Eighth Day and most recently we co-wrote the liturgy focusing on Creation which we will use until Advent. I am deeply blessed by being a part of New Creation mission group. I am supported and loved just as I am which seldom occurs out in the world. They patiently watch my PowerPoint presentations of my polar bear photography and encourage me to follow my call, which I believe is using my photography to educate and activate others to do something about the climate crisis we are facing.

I also want to mention the environmentally friendly upgrades in the renovated Festival Center. Reducing methane caused by burning natural gas, the Festival Center will now be all-electric and there are solar panels on the roof providing much of that electricity. During this season of Creation, we are all called to make environmentally sound changes in our lives, both individually and corporately. Marja Hilfiker and I have been in a Zoom group discussing the book *All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis*. We are talking about what we can do as individuals, in our own lives, to mitigate climate change.

 Nature heals. One of the reasons I love photographing polar bears is because when I am in their presence, I feel as if I am in the presence of the Divine. I talk to them, in my mind, and thank them for allowing us to share their space. It is a sacred space which renews me and fuels my desire to tell others about the Arctic and why we must protect it before it is too late

Last week Jesse Palidofsky spoke about Jacob wrestling with the Angel by the Jabbok river. Referencing Marjory Bankson’s book, *The Call to the* *Soul*, Jesse told us about Jacob crossing “the poison river.” In the book, Marjory writes “we must confront our fears of radical change, of making a terrible mistake with the time we have. The Poison River is a dividing line between inspiration and application.” Marjory’s explanation of call is a spiral of understanding and action, “an invitation to wholeness.”

I had the privilege to be a part of a four-week class about call taught by Marjory at the Festival Center last year. She told us “Our call is connected to a passion in our lives but also is connected to a wound in the world. Call is something we grow into.” Gordon Cosby said call is “big, impossible, and persistent.” Marjory said call asks us to join the inner life (stages 1-3) to the outer work (stages 4-6). She said call is about a transformation inside of us. But to go from stage 3 to stage 4, you first must cross the “poison river.” Many people, including myself, go around in circles repeating stages 1-3 over and over.

Earlier this month, I decided to cross the poison river and resign my mental health therapist position with Montgomery County Government. This has been a very difficult decision. Much of my identity has been connected to my role as a social worker, as a professional helper. I met Kent Beduhn at Catholic University in the early 1980s while we were both social work students. He and his first wife, Betsy, invited me to Eighth Day on Super Bowl Sunday, 1984. I have been here ever since. I am not exaggerating when I say being a part of Eighth Day has changed my life. It is here where I found my chosen family, learned to pray, and became a part of a community that holds me up every day. In addition, working for Montgomery County for thirty-five years has also played a part in my transformation. But it is time to cross the poison river and walk over the threshold of my next right path. Every day I ask God to show me the next right open door(s).

Os Guinness writes about call in his book *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of your Life*. He writes, “calling is the most comprehensive reorientation and the most profound motivation in human experience … placing the final aim of life beyond the world, where it is meant to be. Answering the call is the way to find and fulfill the central purpose of your life.” He also writes, “the call of Jesus is personal but not purely individual; Jesus summons his followers not only to an individual calling but also to a corporate calling.”

In Paul’s Letters to the Philippians, Paul exhorts those in the church at Philippi to be joyful, the Lord is near, never worry about anything, but

tell God all your desires of every kind in prayer and petition filled with gratitude, and the peace of God which is beyond our understanding will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.

I chose to give a teaching today because this scripture is one of my favorites and I try to follow these instructions every day. I pray daily, usually out loud, my cats don’t seem to notice, and I tell God everything that is in my heart and mind.

I believe I began praying at a very early age. As most of you know, I was horribly abused as a young child by neighbors, who were friends of my adoptive parents. I was insecure and fearful and wanted to please others, which is probably why those evil people chose to victimize me. Although I can’t remember doing so, I know I cried out to God to save me from the abuse I did not know how to escape.

The Psalmist says in Psalm 71: “Upon You have I trusted from my birth, You, whom I knew before my mother’s womb. Hear my prayer that these fears may be transformed, O You, who are my Counselor.” In Sunday school, at the Methodist Church we attended, they told us God and Jesus loved us and heard our prayers. Luckily for me, we moved to Virginia when I was in the second grade which ended the abuse. I suppressed for decades the memories of the trauma I endured although my emotions, decisions, and behavior were often caused by the suppressed experiences.

Praying does not require any special training or experience. You can be any age, race, belong to any socioeconomic group, be a worker or retired. Prayer doesn’t require any special clothing, accessories, or environment. People pray outdoors, indoors, sitting on a chair or on the floor. There are companies that sell expensive meditation aids such as shawls, cushions, singing bowls, kneeling platforms, incense, and beaded necklaces. Rosaries have been used by Catholics for millennia and many report their efficacy. I’m sure they assist with concentration much like my praying out loud does for me. Reading scriptures or reciting poems or favorite sayings may aid some people. Yoga has been used to prepare people to pray from time immemorial. Many people swear by prayer in the morning and others in the evening. I also believe *singing and music* are forms of prayer. Our hearts soar when the community sings together praising God. Even without instruments, people learned to sing songs celebrating God’s Creation which helped build the blessed Community. Richard Rohr said, “Nature is the one song of praise that never stops singing.”

 Luisely Melecio-Zambrano has been hosting Zoom Ignatian Prayer on Thursday evenings. I am amazed at what comes up within the sacred circle created during those sessions together. Recently, “Be a full-time artist” came to my mind within that sacred space. That helped me know I was ready to cross the “poison river” and leave my county job. As we end our Ignatian Prayer sessions, Luisely gives us some invitations. She said one evening “prayer is allowing ourselves to be in the presence of God in a stance of reception.”

Luisely usually asks us in Ignatian Prayer “what does God want you to notice?” and “where is God?” During a recent session, I believe God was telling me, “I have been patiently waiting for you to decide.” Every day I ask God to help me see the open door(s), the threshold over which I will walk onto my next right path. All this time, while I was asking God for the lit path, God was waiting for me to be ready to leave one phase of my life before the next path can be revealed.

 All of these practices help us foster the most important relationship in our lives: our relationship with the Divine.

 In Psalm 71 it says, “In You, O my Beloved, do I take refuge; Let me never be separated from You!” Like tuning a radio or increasing the Wi-Fi signal, we are seeking God’s attention and assistance when we pray.

In Psalm 84 it says,

Blessed are they who put their strength in You, who choose to share the joy and sorrows of the world. They do not give way to fear or doubt; they are quickened by Divine Light and Power. For the Beloved is as radiant as the sun and invites each one to come to partake of the Banquet.”

Gordon Cosby, co-founder of Church of the Saviour, wrote in *Seized by the Power of a Great Affection,* “Keep following, keep praying, keep loving.”

Let us sing, pray, accept, forgive, love eternally so that we, and everyone we meet, will know God is real and exists here and now in our community and in the world.

 We can be the Beloved community Jesus calls us to be.