

Faith In Practice

Life Changing Medical Mission

You are here. Yes, I am.



Sometimes, when we pray, our words tumble over each other in a rush. Loudly, they crowd each other out. Sometimes, jumbled words deafen.

Sometimes, when we pray and no words come, we strain to listen. Loudly, the absence of sound echoes in a cavern of darkness. Sometimes, God's silences deafen.

Sometimes, our hearts burn within us and we know we have heard God's voice, and God has heard ours.

Prayer. Essential and elusive. Comforting and enigmatic. Fraught with expectation.

Prayer. "You are here." "Yes, I am." These words have been playing about my heart since reading Pádraig Ó Tuama's book *In the Shelter*. There he writes he has always thought these words were a

good place to begin something that might be called prayer. They are how a certain indigenous tribe in New Guinea greet each other for they have no word for 'hello' in their language. Rather, the one arriving is greeted with, 'You are here.' And the other responds, 'Yes, I am.' This has captivated me, I think, because there is a gravity, a solemnity in the words that acknowledges the full presence of the other.

So, I wonder what might happen if I were to come into a time of prayer and whisper this New Guinean greeting. Would I begin with 'You are here' and await God's 'Yes, I am'? Or would I sense God's 'You are here' as I approach? How much time would elapse before my words would tumble forth or my ears strain. Or could I linger in this space. This space of 'You are here. Yes, I am.' Would that be enough? Would that prayer be more than enough as I linger?

I sit down to write about greeting and prayer and presence. But, then God surprises. For I write: Sometimes, our hearts burn within us and we know how we have heard God's voice, and God has heard ours. *And, we ask ourselves, were we praying just then?*

And, I realize that most, if not all, of the times I have heard God's voice, it has *not* been when I had closed my eyes and asked God to listen to me. Nor has it been when I have quietly sat with my head bowed, waiting for God to speak into my silence. It has not been when I was praying. Rather it has been when I was surprised, taken off guard, by a moment of wonder and I simply whispered, 'Thank you.'

I was recently at dinner (socially distanced of course) where I was asked about my life's journey. And, I found myself recounting moments when I had seen God present in my life. Moments when I knew God was right there. Maybe through the right person showing up at the right time, or in a miracle of coincidence, or even in a mistake, or in a grace extended. Moments when I would stop and say, "You are here." And I could hear God say, "Yes, I am." I left that dinner with a grateful heart, because this couple had given me the chance to remember. And to remind me that those moments were in prayer. For in them, I was with my God and my God was with me. And, I knew it.

We have many stresses before us now. We are looking for answers. We are on our knees more than many of us have been in a long time. If like me, at times, your words may be crowding out God's voice. Or, in your shocked silence, you may not be hearing God's voice but rather a deafening void. But, I hope that when you come to your time of prayer now, you might lay down the expectation and remember that this time of prayer is just the beginning. It is furrowed ground, seeds deeply buried. Seeds that shall grow. And, that this time is preparing you for other moments of prayer which are not bounded by the time you have set aside. But rather moments of prayer that are sprinkled throughout your day, moments waiting for you to recognize God's presence all around. Moments made in 'prayer' because you have recognized God in them, giving you the chance to say, "You are here. Thanks be to God. You are here."

And, my hope for you as I come to the end of this reflection is that you might take a moment to remember. To remember all of the times when you were surprised by God's presence in your life. And, trust. Trust that just as God has surprised you before, surely, God shall surprise you again. Even in this. Especially in this. With wonder. With joy.

As for me, I am now starting my time of prayer with these words and allowing the moments to flow over me. Stretching them out a bit more each day. And, I am taking the hope of these words with me into the hours that follow. So that I might be prepared to receive the gift of God's presence when I least expect it. And, that I might step out in hope in a new way so that I might be that gift for others. God's wonder flowing through my day in a new way. May it be so for you too. This day. Every day. All to God's honor, glory, and praise.

Rev. Linda L. McCarty
President & CEO

Photo above was taken by Linda in Yorkshire in 2019.

Forward to a Friend

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