

August 22, 2010/Season after Pentecost/David L. Edwards

### Further Thoughts on Taking Refuge

Psalm 71:1-6 *In you, O Lord, I take refuge...Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me....*

Jeremiah 1:4-10 *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
and before you were born, I consecrated you...”*

Luke 13:10-17 *Jesus heals on the Sabbath.*

"Taking refuge" is a very important part of our spiritual practice as followers of Jesus. It is the way we live so that we are always grounding our lives in our relationship with God. Taking refuge is another way we can speak of what we call the inward journey.

Psalm 71 begins: "In you, O Lord, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame." It goes on to speak of God as rock of refuge and strong fortress. The psalmist acknowledges God as the source of his life since childhood. Taking refuge is not avoiding reality. It is not running away from our problems or the world's problems. It is returning to what is most real—our relationship with God. Taking refuge in God and our relationship with God DOES mean turning from certain so-called realities. There are many things about life around us that detract from and contradict who we are as God's beloved people. For many reasons, we often feel under assault, alienated from ourselves and others, confused, or just slogging through each day, putting one foot in front of the other, existing but not really living.

Taking refuge means a return to our relationship with God, in which we recover our sense of belonging and purpose. God is rediscovered as a rock of refuge and a strong fortress. We regain within ourselves a kind of solidity or inner strength. This happens as we practice regular times of silence and prayer, times of solitude when we become aware of our lives in God. We stop, we breathe, we quiet ourselves. We let go of preoccupations, aware of our thoughts and feelings but not attaching to them. There is a very physical dimension to prayer, which we often overlook. Prayer is far more than thinking about God. It is BEING in God's presence, BEING in our relationship with God. When we breathe with awareness so that we are truly in the present, when we sit straight and alert, then we experience the solidity the psalmist is talking about. When we practice taking refuge in this way, we experience something of what the psalmist speaks of as God, our rock and fortress.

The community of faith is to be a place of refuge for children as well as adults. We are to be a community in which children's relationship with God is recognized and valued. They are to be received the way Jesus received children, a those who can lead us into the kingdom. If we let them, children will teach us how to live and pray more simply, more honestly, and with a heightened sense of wonder. We run the risk of being too much an adult-oriented community—too serious, too complicated, too wordy, too joyless, and too full of activism. Children are natural-born contemplatives and mystics! Those who think children have to always be "entertained" or assaulted with noise and hyperactivity have never taken the time to really be with young children. Children often know better how to be with themselves in their relationship with God than we do. They can and need to experience quietness and solitude, and they need adults with them who themselves practice a prayerful life.

Finally, the woman possessed by a crippling spirit finds refuge in Jesus after eighteen years of suffering. She doesn't even ask him for help. He sees her condition and acts out of compassion to liberate her. Jesus' healing of this woman offends the religious establishment and upsets the religious order of things. He has healed on the sabbath, which the synagogue leader sees as upsetting the status quo. He seems quite reasonable about it. Look, he says to the people, you have six days in which to come here and find healing. Let's not spoil the sabbath by upsetting the rules. Jesus pokes a big hole in this. Even on the sabbath, he says, don't you untie your ox or donkey to take it for a drink of water? That's "working on the sabbath." How come you are so upset when a human being who is suffering

receives healing on the sabbath? Have you forgotten what we are