

July 26, 2015 / Season after Pentecost / David L. Edwards

Every Day I Will Bless You

Psalm 145 *Every day I will bless you, and praise your name forever and ever.*

Ephesians 3:14-19 *I pray that...God may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through God's Spirit...*

John 6:1-15 *When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.*

As you probably know by now, I tend to speak and reflect more on the inward journey than the outward journey. It is not because I believe the outward is less important. Far from it. The inward and outward dimensions of our lives and faith are intertwined and interdependent. I have found, however, that the lack of a regular, daily inward journey time adversely affects how we live in the world, how we relate to others, how we go about doing what we feel God calls us to do. If we want to be people responding to God's call in Jesus to serve the needs of the world around us, we must recognize that such a life needs the foundation of time spent daily in silence, quietness, prayer, study, growth in self-awareness and self-understanding, and immersion in our relationship with God. We can be channels of God's love and forgiveness in the world when we take the time needed to touch that love and forgiveness in our own lives as something real. If we want to make a difference in the world, in the lives of others, for good, we need to know and embrace our authentic personhood, our callings, and our gifts. That is our inward journey work.

In Ps. 145, the psalmist makes a vow: *Every day I will bless you, and praise your name forever and ever.* This is the same vow, or intention, we make when we commit ourselves to a daily time of inward journey. When we do this, we become aware, over time, that we live in a world full of God's works (v. 10), all giving thanks to God. We grow in awareness of the sacred dimension of life, which is full of benevolence, constantly being sustained and replenished. We become aware of the justice and kindness of all God's ways (v. 17), that the world does not and cannot work by people treating one another unjustly or with unkindness. Bountiful care, just and kind relationships—these things are inherent in the world as God created it. We

awaken to all of this as we take the time each day to quiet our incessant thinking and roller coaster emotions. Then we see life more clearly, and our place in it.

So, the inward journey of daily blessing and praising God is the way we become truly present to our own lives and to life around us. It is growing and deepening in our awareness of our life in God. Over time, the reality we call “God” moves from our heads into our hearts, into our awareness. We become less inclined to talk about God, using words, concepts, names, and more inclined to silent inward sensitivity to the sacredness of life that surrounds us. At the end of the psalm, the psalmist says that *the Lord is near to all who call on God, who call on God in truth (or sincerity). God fulfills the desire of all who fear God; God also hears their cry, and saves them.* When I read these words this time around, they spoke to me in a new, fresh way. I believe that God is near all of us, all of the time, that God is the everywhere presence of the Power of Life. However, not all human beings are open to that Presence, and it is obvious in the ways they live. Being closed to the everywhere present God, who is justice and kindness, who is the generous source of all life, breeds in us alienation from each other and the earth, a concern only with our own safety, well-being, and comfort, and violence against others in thought, word, or deed. Being closed to the everywhere-present God who is compassion and love creates loneliness, despair, and self-hate. How can we be truly, deeply happy and content if we are not aware that we are connected to and constantly loved by the very power that is the source of all that is?

God is near to all who call, who open to God with sincerity of heart and mind. The inward journey is this opening to God every day, so that we end up living throughout the day in awareness of our life in God. Opening to God in this way, we live out of that relationship in compassion, concern for justice, and spiritual and material generosity that gives so that others might have life. Furthermore, when we are able to practice quietness in God's presence, when we are able to be at peace with ourselves in God, we experience, as the psalm says, our “desires being fulfilled” and God's “saving” of us. Because of the society we live in, our hearts and minds become filled with many desires that do not lead to fulfillment. We constantly look outside of ourselves for fulfillment. The practice of the inward journey leads us to the reality that we are already fulfilled. We already have all that we truly need. We are able to let go of the ever-dissatisfying search for some holy grail of fulfillment outside of ourselves. We discover the reality of Jesus' teaching that the kingdom is already nearby, even within, us. And when we begin to learn and to grow in that awareness, we experience

wholeness, which is the meaning of salvation. We are healed.

There is something else that we gain through regular inward journey time. We grow in what the Zen Buddhist teacher and peace-maker Thich Nhat Hanh calls “solidity”. When we sit for meditation or prayer, or even when we worship together, we need to be solid in our sitting. That means sitting straight, but not rigid, so that we experience a physical sense of being strong and solid. Most of us were not taught that there is a physical aspect that aids and enhances the inward, the spiritual. Sitting straight so that we feel solid. Breathing easily and being aware of our breathing. Remember that the Hebrew word—as well as the New Testament Greek word—for spirit also means breath, as well as wind. There is a connection between our breathing and the spirit of life that God gives us. We need to use that and to enjoy it as part of our inward journey.

The physical posture of prayer cultivates inward solidity and strength. This is especially important when we are working with strong emotions or difficult, emotionally-charged experiences that bring stress, anxiousness, fear, or worry. Outward solidity helps us work inwardly with those things without being overcome by them. I thought about this when I read these words in our passage from Ephesians: *I pray that, according to the riches of God's glory, God may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with the power through God's Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.* Strengthened in our inner being through the power of God's spirit. Christ, our true, authentic life, dwelling in our hearts through faith, as we are being rooted and grounded in love. These are words about strength, about solidity. The practice of daily prayer, of what we call our inward journey, builds up in us, over time, a strength, a power, a solidity that comes from being more and more open to God's spirit, and increasingly rooted and grounded in love, in God who is love.

I have seen this in others, and in myself. When we make that commitment to giving time each day to our inward journey—prayer, silence, inner quietness, and so forth—we find that we become more peaceful, more centered in our true selves, clearer about what we are called to give to the world, where it is we can help. And we become better able to weather, and even learn from and be strengthened by, the storms that inevitably blow into our lives.

The inward journey is the “place” to which we withdraw when we feel ourselves

getting lost or overwhelmed by the human world in which we live, or when we otherwise feel ourselves being swept away from who we truly are in God. Look at the story in John's gospel. It is the familiar story of Jesus feeding five thousand people from a small amount of food provided by a young boy. It is a story about abundance, when we think there is scarcity, possibility where we see only impossibility. Jesus is about abundance and about people living abundant lives of love. Mind you, this is not the kind of material, or even spiritual, abundance pandered by television evangelists. It is the abundance of living our lives out of our relationship with God, living in trust, in faith, in love, and in service to others and the world.

Jesus feeds the multitude. The crowd takes it as a sign that Jesus is *the prophet who is to come into the world*. He must be God's messiah come to save us and install God's kingdom. Jesus senses that they want to make him a king, a ruler, some kind of spiritual guru. What does he do? He runs in the opposite direction. He heads for the hills. He retreats to the mountain to be by himself. The gospels show us Jesus as someone who is not interested in the kind of success defined by our society, even by most of our religion. He runs from it! He is interested in helping people wake up to who they really are. He wants them to know that they are the light of the world, and are to let their light shine (Matt. 5:14ff). He is about calling people to their own inner relationship with God and to outward service, responding to the needs of all God's children and God's world. Jesus knew that it was of vital importance that he not forget where he came from, who he was in God, and the particular calling God had implanted in his very being. I have to say that when I read this story this past week, I noticed this ending for the first time. And it delighted me! This picture of Jesus seeing a wave of people coming toward him, wanting to sweep him away, wanting him to be who THEY wanted him to be...and he high-tails it to the mountain to be by himself! We, too, need to remember that there is are times when we need to do the same thing, so that we do not forget or let go of who we truly are in God.

Every day I will bless you, and praise your name for ever and ever. That is the essence of the inward journey. However, a couple of days ago, Kaye said to me, "But our outward journey is also our blessing of God." Yes. And is that not the truest and most wonderful way to understand our lives, these brief, precious lives we have been given? Inwardly and outwardly, we make the whole of our life a blessing of God.