

Please Record

Butter and good luck

Let's see a show of hands. Who likes butter?

Now recall a time when you were lucky recently?

Mary Oliver the great poet in one of her poems, speaks of God like butter and good luck. I wonder where the luck shows up in Matthew's gospel today?

Did the slave really feel God's forgiveness from deep within his heart? Or did he feel lucky?

In this season of creation we are also focusing on the environment and thus the second reading was not traditional. It was from Terry Tempest Williams, she is an American writer, educator, conservationist, and activist.

I need to come clean...unlike Salying the earth and the environment I took for granted for much of my young life. The earth brought, or rather my outside life brought ticks, poison ivy, mosquitos and such. I did not like getting dirty. I preferred to be inside with the tv or driving in my car. The quiet and wild earth made me uncomfortable. Awe in creation was remote for me.

Almost 30 years ago I visited Lake Tahoe for the first time. I skied Heavenly and one of the runs feels like you will ski right into the blue water, it was Heavenly. This was an entry to the awe of nature and the vastness of the good earth.

Today we heard in the gospel Matthew telling his Jewish audience to forgive 77 times. Then he tells a parable. Maybe you are like me, parables are confusing, like the jokes I don't get.

Part of my lay preaching class centers around exploring the scriptures in different ways. One way they instructed us is to try to read the texts in a new place. I have this view point in Lake Tahoe that I like to sit at and pray

at. So several weeks ago I went to this spot with its amazing view and read the texts. Well, honestly nothing happened. No great insights, no ideas, no writing on the wall, nothing. Somewhat disappointing. A great silence.

I decided to try another way of exploring the text, it's called Ignatian Contemplation.

The just of it is that you imagine yourself in the scene, you could be one of the characters, a fly on the wall, yourself imposed into the story, there are many possibilities. The intention is that you are curious and open to see or hear God in another way.

In the parable, I tried to imagine being the slave. The one who got his debt wiped clean and then he turned around and went to his fellow slave to get him to repay his debt. As I imagined being the slave I thought and felt my relationship with the lord was one of good luck. A get out of jail free card. I felt this luck as all my debts were absolved. It was magical. I'm not sure it will happen again.

My contemplation ended because I started wondering how one moves beyond seeing God and forgiveness as good luck and into mercy, wild mercy?

I was stuck. Then I sat long and hard, in the quiet, thinking of a time in my spiritual path I felt forgiveness, deep forgiveness.

What came is my centering prayer practice, stay with me.

I always had a vigorous prayer practice so the thought of just sitting in silence felt inadequate, but I gave it a try. This is a silent prayer practice, no words or doing anything, nothing.

Centering prayer revolves around sitting in silence for 20 minutes and if you get distracted by thoughts you say your sacred word to bring you back to God. For many years I would rate this practice, not good today, too many thoughts, my grocery list, the child I was worried about today, whatever. I would feel shame that I was not doing it perfectly and was failing God.

When I would tell my spiritual director, she would repeat, Fr Thomas Keatings, words about distracting thoughts, “that is wonderful, that means you had one million occasions to return to God!”¹

For years I would hear this and believe God was forgiving me but I had not accepted it in my bones.

I didn't feel it in my body. Then overtime this wild mercy settled in me. I felt forgiveness deep in my heart. I don't know when it exactly happened but now I feel such joy in showing up to God with nothing, knowing she is expecting nothing and just delighting in my presence.

This is how mercy feels.

It is gradually absorbed into our body and is accepted, usually with wonder and awe. When mercy enters the scene there is no retribution, no I told you so, no you should have known better. It's something that doesn't make sense in the head space. It can only be felt over time in quiet without distractions.

Maybe I needed to forgive myself 77 times, over and over again before it settled deep within.

One thing I have heard is that God's first language is silence. I believe it was St John of the Cross. The earth is quiet.

God I'm thinking gives us this quiet creation as a path to invite us to linger. In this time God speaks to us in silence. God uses this creation as a vehicle to love. It has helped me move beyond butter and good luck.

So that sitting at my view point in Lake Tahoe was not in vain. It was God loving me in the silence with wild mercy and encouraging me to delight in

¹ <https://ost.edu/fr-thomas-keating-and-centering-prayer-reclaiming-the-christian-contemplative-tradition/>

creation and linger gently. To protect what is wild is to protect what is gentle.

Sitting in silence, without noise or distractions and waiting and waiting, helped me to hear God say, my dear you cannot tell one about mercy it can only be felt.

Why must people kneel down to pray? If I really wanted to pray I'll tell you what I'd do. I'd go out into a great big field all alone or in the deep, deep woods and I'd look up into the sky-up-up-up- into that lovely blue sky that looks as if there was no end to its blueness. And then I'd just feel a prayer.
-L.M. Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables*

Where are you in your relationship with butter and good luck and where are you in accepting this wild mercy, or rather feeling it?