

“Dance With the Lord”

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There has been much in the news to trouble us in recent weeks and days. Between cyclones and earthquakes there has been a staggering loss of life. The price of fuel is skyrocketing. The war in Iraq continues. The world seems to be out of balance and our faith faces challenges every day. The question for some is: where is God?

God is in the midst of the suffering! God’s mercy, comfort, hope, and love are there in the midst of all the destruction, warring, and economic decline. Sometimes that is hard to grasp especially when we are affected personally and our faith is severely tested. If we look closely we can see God acting. If we are still we can hear God speaking and suddenly the light shines through the darkness. Planes loaded with clean water, food, and medication arrive, people are still found alive under the rubble. This past week, a woman was pulled from the debris nine days after the earthquake- alive and suffering from non-lifethreatening fractures. God is in the midst of suffering.

We see God working through human beings who have responded to the summons from the Holy One to act out their faith whatever path that may take. From organizations to individuals, the response to catastrophic events is typically overwhelmingly generous in responding to the needs of those suffering. God calls and we say yes.

But what about in our daily lives, where is God? Where do we put our faith in the midst of our daily struggles and worries? In Matthew we heard the familiar passage

about not worrying about tomorrow. Jesus is telling his disciples that worrying about what they eat, drink, or wear is folly. Gathering up material possessions is not real wealth, rather it is spiritual bankruptcy. The disciples are admonished to keep God first and then everything else will fall into place. We are called to do likewise. It is our spiritual riches that make us truly wealthy; riches that come from our striving to bring about the kingdom of God here and now.

Where do we put God? We are caught up in the harried pace and sheer noise of daily life. With all the distractions it is easy to push God to the side. When we do that, we deprive ourselves of the peace that God is offering us every minute of every day. We worry and fret over the little things and we fail to take advantage of the strength, courage, and grace that is ours when we seek God first—even in the littlest details of our lives.

God calls us to be partners in repairing creation- in helping to restore balance to the world. We begin that by restoring order to our own micro-world- ourselves our families our communities. God has given each of us unique and special gifts. How we choose to utilize those gifts is our gift to God and to all those whom we encounter.

When God calls us to bigger things we shrink back. It's the "big stuff" that God calls us to do that we really don't want to deal with and we make excuses—I'm really busy and stressed out God. Couldn't you ask someone else, just this once? I'll do it next time. Okay?" What we're really saying is we are worried- I can't possible do something like that- there must be someone else more qualified- worry

worry worry. You know what? I believe that God knows the right person for the task. Each of us has unique talents and capabilities that no one else on earth has and God needs us to be willing servants. Will it be easy? No. Will it require a leap of faith? Yes. Each day we are given the gift of time- another chance-a clean slate- opportunities to respond to God using our gifts.

Some of us take longer to respond to God's purpose for our lives. I had known from an early age as my faith was beginning to form, that I was being pulled by God but didn't know what to do with those feelings. As a teenager, I had a strong sense that I was being called to help people and so a nursing career was the path I considered. I remained in nursing in various ways for 34 years. Throughout those years my faith, tested in a myriad of ways, was growing ever stronger. I still felt God pulling me to something else-a different path; yet, still never verbalizing it. It wasn't until I moved to N.C. and gave up my nursing registration that I was forced to confront in earnest what God had been trying to tell me all along. God was calling me out of my comfort zone- calling me to be a minister. I finally verbalized this calling and to my astonishment those around me said "well it's about time." Others saw things in me that I was too afraid to acknowledge. I was too worried that I was not the right one; worried that I didn't measure up to the task.

Once the cat was out of the bag there was no going back. But I finally realized that if this was what I was being called to do, then God would walk with me. The road would still be bumpy but God would pick me up, dust me off, and we'd continue the journey together. This calling required that I obtain my bachelors degree

because I had graduate not from a degreed nursing program but a diploma program. I took on the task of going to college four years ago after being out of school for a very long time. I think the Holy Spirit has not been leading me through doors but has had to literally push me; perhaps shove would be closer to the truth, through doors over the last four years. The first was the door of my undergraduate college that first day. And again this past September the Holy Spirit was pushing me through the doors of Yale Divinity School. This time it wasn't school that was worrying me- it was the fact that I would be living on my own for the next three years and my staunchest supporter- my husband would have to remain in NC to take care of things there. His ministry has been to care for abused and abandoned animals but that's another sermon topic. And this week I had to be pushed through the doors of the hospital where I will be working as a chaplain. The worry this time is about my ability to actually carryout pastoral duties. In every case, when I stopped trying to do it on my own, stopped worrying and thanked God for simply being with me on this journey, God granted me the strength and courage to accomplish the work.

My husband always refers to the new aspect of our lives as a journey and I have recently come to look at it as a dance. How many of you remember your school dance—boys on one side—girls on the other and this vast empty space in the middle—each side worried. The boys were worried we girls would say no and we girls were worried the boys would never cross the gulf that divided us to ask for a dance. Now, that long ago memory is no longer how I look at dancing. Dancing is

work, action, moving in rhythm with a partner sometimes slow, other times fast. It is fun and exhilarating.

Our hymnal does not have the hymn “Lord of the Dance,” so let me read a few verses of the poem to you. (Stanzas 1, 2, and 5) Christ is the Lord of the Dance and will lead us.

I am certain most of you are familiar with the poem “Footprints in the Sand,” where at one point there are two sets of foot prints and then only one. Well, not too long ago I read another version in which there are still the sets of two footprints and then the one but suddenly there is a spot where the footprints go absolutely wild in all directions. The poem goes on to explain that the set of double footprints is when God walked alongside; the single set is when God had to carry the individual. But when the person asks God what the area of wild footprints is God answers: “Don’t you remember my child? That was when we danced!”

From Lee Ann Womack’s song, “I Hope You’ll Dance” we hear these words “I hope you’ll give faith a fighting chance. And if you get the chance to sit it out or dance, I hope you’ll dance.”

In the dance of life some of us are called to waltz, others to tango and still others to rock and roll. It takes a strong partner to lead and guide the other half of the dance team. It is up to the leader to guide the other person in their footsteps; to gently guide their partner where they want them to go. God calls us to be God’s partner in the dance of life. Along with that call we are given the strength and courage to become the person God intends for us to be. My prayer for each and every one of

you is that you will give your worries over to God and seek to know God's intentions for you no matter what stage of life you are in; that you will put into action what you are being called by God to do and be. And finally with hearts unburdened and footsteps lightened you will become God's partner in the dance of life. I am the Lord of the dance said he and I will lead you in the dance said he. I pray you will choose to dance with the Lord in whatever way God chooses.