

Blow bubbles. God has a message for you today. Be still and open yourself to God's message.

That's how our day started over. We blew bubbles together and my then five year old cousin, Walter, thought I was the best cousin ever. Then he asked me to go hunting with him. I was beginning to get nervous. I had a lot of stuff to do. I had to pack, read, study. I was preparing for my move from Vermont to Denver in about a week. I didn't have the time or desire to go hunting, whatever that meant. Hunting, really? It was the middle of August and nearly 100 degrees with the humidity. I had no idea what he was talking about but I felt like I didn't actually have a choice in the matter. Walter asked me and didn't wait for my answer. He ran off the porch and into the yard. "Come ON, Hillary," he shouted. "Walter, I'm just going to go inside. I have some stuff to do. Remember, I'm moving soon," I told him. I went inside and left Walter to his own devices for a few minutes anyway.

I think Jesus probably feels like my cousin, Walter, did. Jesus urges us to go on adventures with him while we claim that we have stuff to do. I bet if Jesus sat next to you, in the flesh, you would stop what you were doing and have some coffee with him. Or would you? I consider myself to be more like Martha so I might not hang out with Jesus but I'd like to think that I would.

The thread that is woven throughout the Scriptures this week is humility. In three different contexts, we will see how God calls us to humility.

In the book of Matthew, Jesus criticizes the scribes and Pharisees. First of all, let us remember that scribes were professionals comparable to a lawyer in our current time. Pharisees consisted of mostly laypeople who followed very strict religious beliefs. Jesus condemned what they did. He said that what they **taught** should be followed but their **deeds** should not. Jesus believed that the scribes and Pharisees were boastful and that they enjoyed their position much more than they should have, saying: "They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students" <sup>6-9</sup> Through this scripture, Jesus urges us towards humility and to remember that we are students and God is our own rabbi. Rabbi traditionally means "teacher" in Hebrew but I found one commentary that said that here means "my great one". Jesus reminds us that God is the ultimate teacher and others are modest helpers. The scribes and Pharisees should turn people toward God, not to themselves.

Brad...your own Pastor Brad once told me to remember that there is a God and I ain't it. When I think of what Jesus taught in this lesson, I remember one of the traditions mentioned in 12 step

groups: “Tradition Two: For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.” I think there might be some validity here. In whatever we do, aren’t we all just trusted servants? Even the CEO of a major company or even the President of the United States is just a humble trusted servant regardless or not if he or she feels that way too. Thinking about tradition two from the 12 steps helps us let go and remember that we can’t control people, places, or things; God is the ultimate being here.

Psalm 107 reminds us to “give thanks to the Lord, for God is good”<sup>1</sup>! AMEN! God leads the way, right? Throughout this Psalm we see people who are hungry, thirsty and when “they cried to the Lord in their trouble, God delivered them from their distress”<sup>6</sup>. Some scholars believe this Psalm refers to giving thanks and might have been used with sacrifices given at the temple. If we look at verse 22 we see how that might be a possible hypothesis: “And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell of God’s deeds with songs of joy”.

The structure of Psalm 107 is like a sermon. One commentary mentioned the beginning of Psalm 107, is the beginning of our sermon: there is a call for worship which is found in verses 1-3: “O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good; for God’s steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those God redeemed from trouble and gather in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.”<sup>1-3</sup>; the next section of the sermon shows personal narratives on how God has touched your life – verses 23-32 are an example. The ending of our sermon shows a conclusion of praise and encouragement for the continued praise of God. This is found in verse 43 “Let those who are wise give heed to these things, and consider the steadfast love of the Lord”. What’s the tangible message from this passage? Psalm 107 calls people to not rely on their own deeds, to be humble, have a relationship with God and you will benefit from God’s goodness and love. Remember this is a passage that gives thanks to God and when we focus on God, we aren’t focusing on our position in this world.

C.S. Lewis said, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it’s thinking of yourself less”. “Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it’s thinking of yourself less”. Humility will take us to a deeper place especially to a deeper place with God. Can we do this? How would that look in our everyday lives?

Parker Palmer agrees that, “Humility is essential to spiritual life”. Palmer says, “as long as I clung to this living death, life became easier; little was expected of me, certainly not serving others”. Again Palmer says, we “live in a creative tension between our limits and our potentials”. I definitely don’t have all the answers here but for me, self-awareness helps get out

of my own head and keeps me thinking of others. One of my friends mentions that her own head is a dangerous neighborhood to live in. God wants us to think of others and to think of God too. We do have the potential to live our best life. I know that sounds a little like Oprah but she's on to something. We all need inspiration and help which God offers; just listen or in my case play with little cousins.

As my cousin Walter bolted down the hill, I remember being annoyed that he wasn't listening to me, the adult in charge, until his dad came to pick him up. He reached the bottom of the hill and looked up at me, sweating and clearly angry. "So Hillary," he said, "we are hunting for fairy houses." WHAT?! Really? I mean it was clearly almost 200 degrees out and we had to hunt for fairy houses. I thought we should watch a movie and have a snack in the air conditioned house but I something inside of me, a little nudge from the Holy Spirit, decided to play along any way. "Ok, Walter. How do we find fairy houses?"

"You don't know what a fairy house looks like? Are you serious? I thought everyone knew that."

"No, I don't know what a fairy house looks like. How do you know what a fairy house looks like?"

"Well I watched it on a movie that my friend, Annie let me borrow." I loosened up a little as I remembered that this would be one of the last days I would spend with Walter before starting my first quarter at Iliff. "So you just look for something that you think a fairy would like to live in. It has to be dark so the fairy can sleep but it can't be too dusty like this." Walter picked up a stick, damp with moss, and threw it. Of course, a fairy wouldn't like to live there, I thought.

I thought of something Audre Lorde, a black feminist poet said in an interview in 1981: "Only by learning to live in harmony with your contradictions can you keep it all afloat. You know how fighting fish do it? They blow bubbles and in each one of those bubbles is an egg and they float the egg up to the surface. They keep this whole heavy nest of eggs floating, and they're constantly repairing it. That's something that we have to do, too, in our own lives--keep it all afloat. If we can survive and teach what we know, we'll make it. But the question is a matter of the survival and the teaching." For me, humility and looking to God helps keep my life, my egg nest in order. Paul, in his letter to the Thessalonians, praises God's authority over all and not the rule of others: "As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory"<sup>11-12</sup>. Paul was humble and tried to help others be the same. Paul supported himself by tent making and other manual labors and never asked for money when he was church planting so the people could focus on God. Paul exemplified humility and asked that

others follow his lead in living a life for God. Audre Lorde reminds us that in life the survival and teaching is difficult, but it's what will keep us alive. Paul recalls "working night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God."<sup>9</sup> Jesus survived and taught us what he knew in hopes that we would and could keep it all afloat. Some days are better than others. Sometimes I can keep my egg nest, my life afloat by asking God for help like the Psalm calls us to do.

Keeping humility in mind and playing that day with Walter kept my egg nest afloat that day. Walter nourishes me and helps me remember what is important in this life. I thought it was silly but ended up having a great time with him. He reminded me that even very serious adults can have fun and connect with God.

That day, Walter and I continued to dream ideal fairy houses. We decided that all the fairies probably lived in the rock wall that my parents built in our backyard when they first married. Walter was my Pharisee that day; Walter encompassed what Jesus was saying a Pharisee should be. Walter strictly adhered to the religious ideal of fairy houses and helped me connect with my God. Walter taught me so many valuable lessons that day and has proved to do so many, many other days since. When I watch scary movies like "Paranormal Activity", I remember that he told me that movies are just pretend and I shouldn't be scared by them. He enjoys spending time with me because I get on the floor and play with him. He asked his mom if I could live with them because I'm so fun. Most of the time, humans, adults don't focus on humility. We focus on to do lists, promotions, budgets, appearance and discernment. Walter helps me live in the moment and remember that God calls me to blow bubbles and play...to be humble and have a relationship with God.

So as I blow more bubbles, please reflect on the message you heard from God and how you can apply that to your life TODAY.

Amen!