

*The Path Beyond Bethlehem:*

*Seeing Deeper Truths:*

*“Making It Through the Flames, Through  
the Waters!”*

Isaiah 43: 1-7; Luke 3: 15-22  
January 13, 2019

***Set up water and pour and touch  
and sprinkle***

START CLOSE IN

Start close in,  
don't take the second step  
or the third,  
start with the first  
thing  
close in,  
the step  
you don't want to take.

Start with  
the ground  
you know,  
the pale ground  
beneath your feet,  
your own  
way to begin  
the conversation.

Start with your own  
question,  
give up on other  
people's questions,

START CLOSE IN

in *River Flow*

New & Selected Poems

Many Rivers Press © David Whyte

don't let them  
smother something  
simple.

To hear  
another's voice,  
follow  
your own voice,  
wait until it  
becomes an  
intimate  
private ear  
that can  
really listen  
to another.

Start right now  
take a small step  
you can call your own  
don't follow  
someone else's  
heroics, be humble  
and focused,  
start close in,  
don't mistake  
that other  
for your own.

Start close in,  
don't take  
the second step  
or the third,  
start with the first  
thing  
close in,  
the step  
you don't want to take.



The path is not a straight line; it's a spiral. You continually come back to things you thought you understand  
...and...then...from your new perspective...see deeper truths.

You are not spiraling out of control or spinning your wheels in a ditch.

You are revisiting old truths with a new perspective and a God given ability to release yourself to a new and deeper truth.

Make peace again with the past so you can be in the present and move ever forward.  
Revisit as you go and grow.

This is a spiritual practice as well as a practical life skill.

Ignatian Spirituality teaches us that Detachment from outcomes, not from emotion, involves the ability to pull back, out of the drama,

and see the moment in ways that make it possible to be present to your own life differently. To see deeper truths.

**Each day a life. Your whole life each day.**

Moving beyond the situation ...far beyond Bethlehem ...precisely because of Bethlehem...taking the path beyond.

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"You are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you."

When was the last time you felt precious?

Honored?

Someone said to you, "I love you."?

God is saying it to you....this morning, right now, every right now.

***Pour, touch...sprinkle***

In the more wondrous moments of being alive,  
we easily feel it....the feeling of being loved.

But are we NOT likely to feel it in the "chaff" moments of life....when waters  
overwhelm, fire surrounds,  
details pile up, self-doubt and pity set in,

peer pressure pressures us, materialism judges us, family betrays us, church upsets us?

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they  
shall not overwhelm you;

when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume  
you."

God with us all moments. Those moments?  
Still gonna happen. It is a spiral pathway!

The promise is we won't face those moments alone and there will be a way through if  
we stay close to the power of God's love for us...and each other!

In Luke, water and fire images represent the power of God with us, the same images as  
in Isaiah. A trust to face our fears and so the power given each one of us to change our  
lives.....power!

God's fire (vs. the world's fire) is cleansing, full of passion and freedom from what has  
been binding you, holding you down, holding you in place.

It is not the fire of "trial by fire" in which you get burned.

It is more "being on fire" with the knowledge that you are precious, honored, and God  
loves you.

You are precious, honored, and loved.

Treat yourself that way!

***Pour, touch...sprinkle***

How would your day be different if each morning as you arose, you more than heard  
the words to trust...

you believed them...  
believed God means them.....

God by your side releasing you from fear so you embrace deeper truths. God willing to  
even take on the world with you.....  
even die to for you...the way the story is told...  
to make the point once and for all to you:  
it doesn't have to be this way!

Say no! to life that burns, corrupts, empties.  
Say yes! to life that restores, renews, fills.

There is something far worse than dying:  
living a broken life, hopelessly.

The baptism of Jesus is at the beginning of a story of unimaginable love and a way to  
live fully.

God is *with us* as we immerse ourselves in prayers  
(as Jesus did right away at his baptism) and  
there *for us* as we turn toward God in living our lives.  
Life is indeed tough.  
And God coaches us and invites us to shatter all the delusions we create

that we can control what happens in life....  
life happens.

Circle round. See it again.  
And let yourself, let God break through.  
That is the promise.  
Like Jesus, put your energy and attention on the wheat of things, not the chaff.

The chaff is where weevils or other pests are found. That is why it is sorted out and  
away.

Our winnowing is about removing what pesters us,  
the pest around us that diverts attention in unhealthy way.

But/And The word winnowing in Greek also means “cradle”

....cradle what is new in us by removing ourselves from the pests and we-evils that try  
to infest our days and distract us from the things most filling and valuable. Stop us in  
our paths.

I know you know I know you know that.....

You have to enter the waters to emerge from them. Life cannot be avoided!

***Pour, touch...sprinkle***

Just like Jesus, through the waters of chaos we descend and, if like Him in spirit, we will rise up and “be” one with God.

Partnering...

Compassionate. Involved.

Generous in all the ways one can be!

...including how you think about others....and about yourself!

Beloved. In whom God delights!

Are these words we dare to speak to ourselves let alone each other?

Are we so afraid of the language of love that we soften the affirmation each of us needs to hear?

I want you to know: I love you! I really do!!

You’ve heard me say this before: I love even the ones of you who don’t like me all that much...and the ones it’s hard for me to like...like the way you’re acting out that is...it’s especially these ones I love for they teach me so much about me and life! I love you!

Yes, I do because each of you holds truth for me on my spiral path of knowing deeper truths.

I can learn so much about me from you!

And, I love that about you!

Do you see others this way, too?

And it takes all the truth I can/we can assemble and piece together about ourselves to make a life that has more wheat than chaff in it!! That keeps us on that path beyond to deeper truths and powers.

And we all need affirmation.

That’s a big part of what coming to worship is all about...being here for each other.

***Pour, touch...sprinkle***

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It is not enough to get near the water,

to just step into the river, and let someone else baptize you.

You have to step in, be baptized, and walk away....  
Wrapped within prayer...ready to change your ways.

Wise Ones know you have to leave by a different way. Remember?

Can you hear God's voice calling you this morning?

Even if the voice of God isn't George Burns, Morgan Freeman, or Jim Carrey...what is the voice of God saying to you, O Beloved, Delightful, Glorious One?

Renew your baptism.....for it is not a one-time occurrence in life but a continue flow of God's grace into our lives.

It's not an entry requirement to a club. It is an on-going renewal offered by God.  
An outward expression of an inward reality!

Listen:

God isn't trying to catch any of us being good or bad,  
or choose some over others, or get rid of any of us.

We are all wheat and chaff. Growing in God's garden!  
There are some choices, some thoughts,  
some parts of how we've identified ourselves

that do indeed need to be burnt away, purified by the fire of love and self-awareness.

There are also parts of each of us that are wheaty and grounded and bear  
fruit....passion fruit...the passionate choices and deeds we make

which give off life giving energies,  
build others up rather than tear others down...  
build up the kindom rather than tear the kindom down.

It's not about making no mistakes,  
it's about our intentions and the fruits they bear  
and the opportunity to renew ourselves  
and re-do our choices.

Staying on the path beyond.

God sees clearly what is and invites us to choose again.

Whoa...if we would only give ourselves  
and each other second chances!

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Baptism is more than a ritual of beginning relationship with the church.

It is a living sacrament.

So that we go beyond saying “I was baptized” to saying “I am baptized....

this is who I am...

a courageous believer in the way of Christ,

looking at my own choices first.”

Known and held within God’s love and protection:

~We cannot do as we please.

~We cannot act as though we are the only one in the world or the only one caught up in any situation.

~Or that it’s “all about us”. Our needs.

~We cannot act as if there is only one right way to do anything.

~We cannot pretend our responsibility is only to ourselves.

~We cannot read more into the choices of others than really is there.

~We cannot go our own way or take the easy way out, trying to escape our responsibilities

But know even if you do nothing about it on the outside, **God is doing something with you on the inside.**

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So through ordinary time we journey with a deepened understanding of the path we are on and who we are as we move forward...spiraling toward deepening truths.

Old truths revisited, revised, and deepened.

We journey together as individuals.

It won’t be easy.

We won’t agree.

We are all different.

We’ll make some mistakes.

Count on it...knowing:

God is with us and redeems us through waters and fire.

For each of us is precious, honored, and God loved.

So, as you listened, what old truth did you revisit this morning? How is it deepened for you are no longer the person you were when you first discovered it...and as you journey, it no longer is enough, the right truth for this time and place in your life.

Take a moment. Name that deeper truth you can now embrace. Write it down in your bulletin, in your heart.

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“You know you are on the right path when you start feeling peace in situations where you would normally feel tension.”

Ego says, “Once everything fall into place, I’ll feel peace. Spirit says, “Find your peace, and then everything will fall into place.”