

*Based on John 6:35 and Ode to Bread by Pablo Neruda*

Many of you know I spent part of my time away last month on an eight day silent retreat, filled with prayer and yoga and meditation.

On the one hand, it sounds idyllic - and it was, in part. I posted a photo of the experience on Facebook, which included the quote: *some poor phoneless fool is probably sitting by a waterfall somewhere totally unaware of how angry and scared he's supposed to be*. Yes, that was me ... eventually.

On the other hand, have you ever tried it? We do not get to that waterfall of peace right away! As soon as we silence all the crazy, angry, scary on the outside, we have to reckon with all the crazy, angry, scary on the inside.

And there is a lot of crazy. A lot of angry. A lot of scary. At least for me. Am I good enough? Will I have enough? How can I fix this? Who is going to fix that? I am really mad at so and so. I am really afraid of such and such. And on and on and on, the inner sirens arise once the outer sirens are quelled.

It may have looked for all appearances as if I was beatifically communing in peace with the waterfall, but inside I was crashing over that waterfall in a barrel of my own construction. *The mind is a dangerous place*, I have heard it said. *Do not ever go there by yourself*.

Fortunately, for us on this retreat, we were not left alone in the dangerous neighborhood of our minds. Expert guides along the way led us through the anchor of our breath, the choice to relax, the presence of our feelings, the compassion of our watchfulness, the trust in our emerging wisdom.

It felt heroic, to a degree, this self-imposed struggle with our inner sirens. As we sank deeper into the silence, a light of hope began to shine through our collective neighborhood, dimly at first, then warmer, and warmer still. The monkey mind began to settle. The gift of grace began to flow.

After all, we were going for *samadhi, nirvana, the realm of God right here in the earth of our body/mind as it is in heaven*. The pinnacle of paradise through the practice of our silence. There is no higher calling than that, we prided ourselves in thinking. Right up until one of our teachers shared the wisdom of a monk she studied with in Thailand.

*Why do you meditate?* the monk was asked, with the student expecting some kind of *nirvana-ish* answer in response. *I meditate*, the monk responded instead, *so that when I walk into town I can see the purple flowers growing up beside the road*.

The whole point is to see more clearly what is already here, the monk says. To feel more fully what is already here. To love more deeply what is already here. Can it be that Jesus invites us, through the mystical meditation of John's Gospel, into a similar awareness?

I AM, Jesus says to the crowd in our Lesson today. You ARE, Jesus implies in these words for us all. God IS, the Hebrew Scriptures have taught us all along. Just Be, we are told, especially on the Sabbath. Just Be.

The Bread of Life! Jesus says to the crowd. I Am, You Are, God Is nourishment, sustenance, hallowed and sacred, but even more than that: *beauty!* Aroma. Rising and falling, *duplicating the mother's rounded womb*, as the poet observes, from *flour, water and fire*. A Holy Mystery, I Am, You Are, God Is, abundant life!

You want a miracle? Jesus says to the crowd. Just look all around you. Just notice. Just see. The energy emerging whole from the bread. The energy emerging whole from you and from me. The energy emerging from the purple flowers on the side of the road. You want a miracle? Jesus says to the crowd. Just look around you. *The will to live itself* is the miracle!

I will confess, I wanted more. To figure out the meaning of life, the end of poverty, dismantling racism, a cure for cancer, the perfect structure for SPC's ministry. Even just a momentary peaceful communion with a waterfall would have sufficed.

Just notice? Just see? Just be? That cannot be all there is, can it?

Until, lo and behold, as one day flowed into another, I saw ... purple flowers hiding among the lilies ... and I gasped. The next day I saw ... purple flowers emerging from the hostas I had driven by earlier in the week without noticing ... and I clapped. The next day I saw ... purple flowers lingering beneath the rose of sharons. And I jumped up and down.

Until finally, on the very last day of the retreat, as I gazed upon my toes rising and falling in walking meditation, one in front of the other, one in front of the other, I saw ... barely visible ... amid the grass and the clover ... I SAW tiny, minuscule, almost microscopic purple flowers emerging from the ground. I took a deep breath and gently lifted my eyes. And I SAW ... barely visible miracles of life and grace and the will to live - purple flowers! - erupting from the ground across the entire landscape. A canopy of compassion had bouyed us the entire time!

My knees buckled, as I collapsed to the ground in awe and wonder and gratitude. My arms stretched out as I lay prostrate on the ground, held in hope by those purple flowers. In that moment, I glory worshiped as I have never worshiped before. We are ALL held in hope, ALL the time, by purple flowers.

I Am, Jesus says in our Lesson today.

You Are.

God Is.

Purple Flowers.

Bread of Life.

Every One.