

Blurting with God

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then Peter said to Jesus, *"Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."*

Have you ever been in a situation where you were so awe-struck that you said or did something that later you thought, "Wow, that was dumb!" "Why did I say that?!" "Why did I do that?!" And you wince a little at the memory and plan to be better prepared with something profoundly wonderful to say or do the next time.

I used to be an avid Nascar racing fan. The first race I got to go to my 6-year-old son wrote a note for me to give to the "legendary" Dale Earnhardt. I took it knowing that the chances of seeing him let alone getting close enough to give him the note were likely nil. But, the opportunity arose. There he was, standing in his garage space—just a few feet from me. Shaking and feeling like I was in the presence of greatness, I approached and somehow, as I reached to hand him the note, I said, "this is a note from my son. He says he is sorry he called you a crasher." Dale graciously took the note and put it in his pocket. I slinked away feeling ridiculous. I didn't even tell him my son was 6! I didn't even say hello, or nice to meet you, or

Years later I had the opportunity to meet Presiding Bishops Katharine Jefferts-Schori and Michael Curry several times and every time I stumbled over the right words to say. Each time adrenalin overpowered me and my brain could not process fast enough to make a calm, well thought out statement. So out came words I did not plan. I call that my blurtness. But each time whatever I said was true and contextually accurate.

I love Elisha's response to being granted his desire to "inherit a double share of [Elijah's] spirit. He is so overwhelmed that all he can say is: "Father, Father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" In our comfortable seats as we listen calmly to this story, isn't it so much easier to think of a more rational response? Like, "Thank you Lord, for letting me see my Father Elijah taken into your glory. I am sad that he is not with me anymore but I am grateful that you have granted my request." Elisha's words

and actions were true and contextually accurate to who he was and where he was. He was authentic.

Some 800 years later, Peter, James, and John get to have what many of us think is the coolest experience ever! Mark does not tell us the reaction of James and John but it seems Mark as well as Matthew and Luke all thought it was important to tell us how **Peter** reacted. Peter, often described as impetuous, must have had some major shot of adrenaline hit him, but he seemingly acts “cool” about the whole thing and does what was customary for the times; he offers “lodging”. In that moment he was his unrehearsed, authentic self.

As I mentioned, we don’t know what the reaction was of James and John other than being terrified. I am guessing I would have been happy to let Peter be the bold one. But note this: they did not run away. They did not forsake Jesus when they came down from the mountain. So I would say their reactions were authentic for them as well.

What Elisha and those apostles had in common was faith. Whatever their raw reaction was to the splendor and glory of God, their faith kicked into action. Terrified of the power and glory of God and yet excited, thrilled, and welcoming, their actions come from having cultivated their faith in daily practice—probably from childhood.

Important to notice here is that Elisha was rewarded for his faithfulness rather than God reprimanding him for how he handled seeing something so spectacular—God gave him the double share of Elijah’s spirit he had asked for. The same thing happened with the disciples upon seeing Jesus transfigured. God spoke, letting them know all was well and I would say they got a hug from God and a commission.

When faced with something amazingly good or incredibly sad, I think it is normal for people not to know what to say or do—to act spontaneously. Each individual has their own unique way of reacting to the unexpected—the unknown.

When faith in the love of God, (and for Christians most especially the love of God in Christ Jesus), is nurtured through daily spiritual practices, our so-called knee-jerk reactions to the unexpected may be raw (and even blurry) but it will also be our authentic selves moved by the Holy Spirit.

I believe we are always wrapped in the same dazzling glory the disciples experienced though we do not see it and are often unaware.

I have told this story many times, and I am sure I have told here as well. Some years ago, our previous Bishop planned three workshops in our diocese on radical faith. She invited Rev. Canon Paul Edwards to be the facilitator. Before he began he lit a candle at the back of the room. Then he proceeded with the workshop. We had lunch, and then more of the workshop. Finally, at the end, he asked how many had been paying attention to the workshop. Of course everyone raised their hand in affirmation. Then he asked how many knew there was a candle burning the entire time. Again, everyone affirmed that they knew it. Then he asked how many paid so much attention to the candle that they did not know what the workshop was about. Nobody had actually been paying much attention to the candle at all.

That's how Christ is in our lives—always there whether we are paying attention or not. While it may be very human to pay more attention to that which we can see, touch, and hear, Jesus taught that our spirituality is also of utmost importance.

It is in the building up of our faith that we can trust that when the unexpected happens, though unrehearsed and raw, our reactions will be faithful and contextually true to who we are and where we are. It is through our living in the faith of God's embrace that we can walk in love—and react in love.

In order to walk in love we need to practice love. I believe love is found in our spirituality.

Fr. Rob has given many sermons on spiritual practices. There are, of course, books galore on the subject. There is a reason. People need to practice spirituality. A book we use here at St. Barnabas is called Strength for the Journey: A Guide to Spiritual Practice by Renee Miller. In it the author details five aspects of spiritual practice: meditation, ministry, media, mind, and movement.

Through daily practice in whatever form works best for each person, a "mountain-top" experience can be accessed. It may not be as profound as the one the disciples had, nor will it likely be as blatant as what Elisha experienced but I believe the unity with God, self, others, and all of creation as described in our Psalm today will fill the

heart and soul in ways unimaginably beautiful if we pay extraordinary attention to our spirituality. In my sermon a few weeks ago I mentioned Thomas Merton's own "mountain-top" experience on a street corner where love was in everything, everywhere he looked. This is what diligent daily spiritual practice does.

We are bombarded everyday with so much negativity that it is easy to pay attention to and get wrapped up in the minutiae—let alone the headlines of politics, the economy, and wars everywhere. It is important to be well informed about what goes on out there, but not at the expense of our relationship with God and the development of our faith.

Staying focused on that "candle" which is Jesus Christ who is ever lit and glowing with the light of love is how we, ourselves can become a part of that light that draws attention away from all the darkness the world is in wherever we are.

The Apostles Peter and Paul were very different people. Their way of living their faith in, and love for, Christ Jesus was different from one another. But I think they and even Christians down to this day have something else in common. I think they had a certain blurtiness about them. I mean, that in their daily lives they were subject to the same unexpected happenings we are subject to and sometimes their reactions were just as unrehearsed as ours.

Now Dale Earnhardt may not have understood my nervous statement but I am sure he understood my intent. I am sure he knew I was being a fan who got a little tongue-tied and he most certainly grinned a little.

I believe that even more so, in our daily encounters with one another, we may have moments when we don't know what to say or do. We might blurt or we might be silent or we might make a gesture that seems odd. But, in those moments our spiritual practice kicks in and we actually are doing exactly what we need to do.

There is a flip side to this of course. That is, being on the receiving end of some blurt or odd action. Just as we hope others will understand when we are faced with the unexpected, we must understand others. Jesus certainly could have been annoyed with his disciples for being terrified—after-all they had been with him on many other occasions where odd things happened—like Jesus walking on the sea. He could have

told Peter it was odd to suggest making a tent for an apparition. But instead he simply told them not to talk about it with anyone.

Jesus is our light and our guide—always with us whether we are paying attention or not. But how much better for us if we practice paying attention and from that practice we learn how to be in the moment whenever the moment arises. We learn that being blurry or silent, terrified, or excited, we are authentic and true to ourselves and with those around us.

Being embraced by the wonder, the splendor, the radiance, the glory of God in our lives is awe-inspiring and can take our breath away in one moment and make us busily taking care of even the most menial tasks with joy the next.

You, everyone of you, feel that embrace right now! Pay attention! Christ is in the room!