

Waiting Prayer

Midweek Reflection #78, October 22, 2009

“I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them and my soul is downcast within me.

Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope;

Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail.

They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

I say to myself, “The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.”

(Lamentations 3:21-14, NIV)

This is the scripture passage from which one of my favorite hymns, “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” was composed.

After two and a half chapters of Lament over Judah’s capture and exile in Babylon, Jeremiah finally reminds us of God’s continuing Love and Faithfulness and in that speaks to God’s constant Presence with them and us even in the midst of our sufferings and trials. Jeremiah encourages us to Wait on the Lord and this is a command I have been trying to understand and obey as I learn to practice different forms of contemplative prayer.

I have been helped in my struggle to understand Waiting Prayer by 2 books by Sue Monk Kidd. (You might have read her novels The Secret Life of Bees or The Mermaid Chair.) Here is one passage that I have found helpful.

“Waiting prayer, as I have already indicated, isn’t found on the regular prayer menu. It has little to do with petition and intercession and getting God to fix things (though these can be important kinds of prayer). Waiting prayer is different.

Author and presbyterian minister Eugene Peterson was quoted in an interview as saying, “the assumption of spirituality is that always God is doing something before I know it. So the task is not to get God to do something I

think needs to be done, but to become aware of what God is doing so that I can respond to it and participate and take delight in it.”

This is the motivation behind waiting prayer. We place ourselves in postures of the heart, in the stillness that enables us to become aware of what God is doing so that we can gradually say yes to it with our whole being.”
(pg 128 + 129 Sue Monk Kidd When the Heart Waits Harper San Francisco 1992)

Sue Monk Kidd throughout the book talks about different postures of the heart . Two examples she gives are the waiting posture of Mary of Bethany, sitting at Jesus feet and listening and that of Blind Bartimaeus the begger, waiting by the road side for the Messiah that he believes can bring him healing. As I have been rereading When the Heart Waits and also a compilation of Sue Monk Kidd’s earlier writings called First Light (Guideposts Books New York 2002), I have been learning about assuming different postures of the heart in waiting on God. I imagine myself as Mary or as Blind Bart, waiting quietly, not telling God what to do but waiting for him to reveal to me what he is already at work doing in me, and those I am concerned for.

I would highly recommend reading these books and practicing the art of Waiting Prayer. If you do give this a try, let me know how it is going for you. Let’s encourage one another to expand and deepen our prayer life.

Under His Mercy,

Howie