

St. James Episcopal Church
New York
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Salvadora

We had just arrived with my church on a mission to the village of San Juan del Sur in Nicaragua for a week of installing water filters. We had met our host families with whom we were staying and Carlos, the 18 year old of my family, offered to walk with us to the local ice cream store. 10 of us were enjoying ice cream when the lights went out, in the ice cream shop, but not just there, through the whole village. As some of you know electrical failures are common in developing countries. So we set out walking home in the dark, it was impossible to see much of anything. As we were walking all of the sudden, I literally fell off the side of the road into an eight foot ditch. Immediately Carlos jumped in the filthy pit of garage I found myself in trying to help me out. I cried out that I could not put any weight on my right foot or leg, something was wrong. My husband and a Nicaraguan from above leaned over the ditch and reached out their hands to lift me up and out, while Carlos supported my weight from below. As I crawled out of the ditch and landed on the earth above flat on my stomach, a large group of people had gathered and they all cried, get up, get up. I said I could not – my foot and leg hurt – so they quickly came and lifted me up for they saw that I was covered with biting ants from the pit and the ground.

I was only a minute standing balanced on the arms of my husband and a Nicaraguan when someone brought a chair from a house and had me sit down. Several people came out of nowhere it seemed, word travels fast in small villages, and began to pour water over me from plastic milk containers to wash the eating ants off my body. As I looked down at my foot and leg I saw a swelling the size of a base ball and knew indeed that I probably had broken something. At this point I was surrounded by people, and I was trembling. Suddenly, but very gently, I felt bodily warmth and a deep, almost uncanny calm come over me, as a Nicaraguan woman wrapped me in her arms from behind the chair. All fear left my body. All would be well. Little did I know how well I would be cared for in this country with one of the worst health care systems in the southern hemisphere.

The group decided to put me in a truck, seven Nicaraguans climbing in the back to make sure I got the care I need, and set off to find the one doctor in town. He was not to be found, so they took me to the small clinic to have them put my leg in a splint so I could travel the hour over the rough roads to the nearest hospital. The only problem was, all the doctors were on strike and the hospital was closed, except for the emergency room, but that is what we needed so we were in good shape. That is until we got there. When we arrived, the hospital looked like something out of a war zone, broken ceilings, xray equipment that looked like it was the first invented, dirty sheets on the gurney, no supplies anywhere, few staff. What transpired in the next 24 hours would take more time than I have in this sermon to tell, but it is a story that changed my life, because of my experience of the inequity of health care for the rich and poor and because of the love and care of the Nicaraguan people who healed my spirit, even while my bones were broken.

Twenty-four hours later in another hospital, four hours away in Managua, one for the wealthy and privileged of the earth, I was operated on for a broken ankle and femur. When I returned to San Juan del Sur four days later, I began to take private lessons in Spanish since I couldn't work on any water project in a cast. I needed only one thing from my Spanish teacher, I told her in Spanish, I had to find the name of the Nicaraguan woman who put her arms around me when I was trembling and find her to thank her, for something profound had happened to me in that moment. As I told my Spanish teacher this, she smiled at me, and said, that woman who put her arms around you, "she is my mother." I couldn't believe it, I then asked, "And what is her name." And she said, "Salvadore", which is Spanish for Salvation.

Salvation – a word so deep intertwined with our faith – but what does it really mean for us now, today, in this moment, during the financial crisis where so many have fallen off the path of prosperity, into a pit of insecurity, uncertainty and where fear seems to appear anew each morning and every evening as the news unravels of more disaster, more home foreclosures, more savings and pension gone, more job losses. Some of us hardly recognize our lives anymore. We feel a bit in exile, a wee bit perhaps like the Israelites in Babylon, surrounded by so many shattered lives, so much loss, so much anxiety and fear for we are captives of something larger and bigger than we can control. We are threatened with becoming slaves and captives of fear in this strange and unfamiliar land we are now entering. Feelings of helplessness and powerless dangerously pull on us threatening our physical and mental health.

In the midst of all this a word from Deutero-Isaiah echoes through the ages to reach us this day where the prophet comes to speak words of comfort to a people feeling overwhelmed, powerless and in a siege of fear. With despair in the shadows and that awful sense of hopelessness comes the words, we can almost hear them with the blasting our stereos, sent to us in neon lights across our plasma TV, so that we cannot miss them, we cannot shut our ears and pretend we are deaf - -

HAVE YOU NOT KNOWN? HAVE YOU NOT HEARD? THE LORD IS THE EVERLASTING GOD, THE CREATOR OF THE END OF THE EARTH. HE DOES NOT FAINT OR GROW WEARY; HIS UNDERSTANDING IS UNSEARCHABLE. HE GIVES POWER TO THE FAINT AND STRENGTHENS THE POWERLESS.

Salvation – does it have something to do with knowing in the bone of our bones, in the very solar plexis of our deepest being, that we do not have to pull ourselves out of the pits of our lives by ourselves, that we are not alone – that we have an awesome God, a wonderous God, an everlasting God who reaches down right where we are and lifts us up, if we can have enough patience to wait upon the Lord. Salvation is not the end of suffering, but to suffering alone.

In today's lectionary we go from the magnificence of the poetry of Isaiah and the awesome almighty God who gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless, to Emmanuel, God with us. In the beginning of Mark Jesus goes from baptism to teaching to healing. He proclaims the coming reign of God and as part of this reign he makes visible among us that the broken shall be healed, the demon possessed set free, those laid low with sickness shall be lifted up and made well.

Jesus, the one who comes to save, begins his ministry healing individuals, from the demon possessed, then Simon's mother-in-law, then the leper and it goes on and on. But Jesus' healing is not as much about curing, as it is restoring people to community, to bringing them back into the wholeness of life lived with, beside, among others. Those

possessed with demons, lepers, the hemorrhaging women, Simon's mother-in-law with fever, the blind and others are restored to their place in the community. Healing requires participation in the life of others. Jesus must have known that isolation is more dangerous to the body and spirit than anything else.

Upon arriving at Simon's house Jesus takes Simon's mother in law's hand and lifts her up. We are told the fever left her. What does she then do, she begins to serve them. Healing restores us to our place in community, not to be subservient to others, but to offer hospitality, a radical and joyous welcome through service. We are told by Mark that evening – the whole city was gathered at the door. Imagine all of New York gathered at the door of St. James, crowds and crowds of people clamoring to get in, because they heard, here you can find healing, here you can find healing from whatever separates us – you --- from knowing the love and peace of God in the midst of whatever circumstances you find yourselves in. And what will they find when they come here? Will there be someone's hand reaching out to lift them up? Will there be someone touching them in the place of their deepest need? Will they find the peace of God amidst a world filled with fear and anxiety? Will there be a community waiting to bring them into the body of Christ that makes the wounded whole?

On that last day when the crucified Jesus could no longer reach out and touch his disciples and followers he said "Disciple, behold your mother, Mother, behold your son." In his last words, Jesus gave us to each other, to be his body, to be family to each other, to be the community of his followers, to heal as he healed.

Maya Angelou writes:

Lying thinking last night
How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf is not stone
And I came up with one thing
And I don't think I am wrong
Nobody, but nobody makes it out here alone
Nobody but nobody makes it out here alone.

The everlasting God, is also Emmanuel, God with us, in us, among us, between us. When we reach out and put Christ's arms around those where sickness, loss, need and insecurity, make people tremble with fear, we may be surprised to find salvation's peace is not far behind not only for them, but for also for us. Salvadora, Salvadora, Salvadora is among us.