



St. Francis meets the leper, [Franciscan media](#)

Greetings!

Please read [Isaiah 55:1-9](#) and [Psalm 139](#)

Do I have to be the hero in my own story? This question came to me in a conversation I had recently and it is a good one. I began to reflect upon this. The question is a lens for me to evaluate my spiritual life this Lenten season. I most immediately want to say No, of course not! But I know better. If denial is my go-to defense, I may be making myself the hero of my own story. Denial is the greatest life altering force for the mundane that I know. And yet, it is such a part of life. To deny is to make yourself the hero. And that just leads to blame, another form of denial and personal hero making. It is hard not to live this life. There is much blame, much to deny and many masks to wear that suggest that I am doing just fine.

“I am sorry that you are not doing fine.”

“But I am. “Let me tell you how great it’s going!”

The question, Do I have to be the hero in my own story? rearranges things and upsets. But isn’t that what we need from the Lenten season? Many Christians spend time giving up dumb things – no sacrifices! Others do not take on disciplines that can heal or move one closer to God. Others do not move closer to the cross. And because of this, the gift is a false sense of the Resurrection.

To be reengaged is the human condition.

I confess! Lent rearranges me!

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is meant to be the ultimate rearrangement, but I am ahead of the narrative and the season. Jesus in his Journey to Jerusalem called upon the



scriptures and the traditions of his faith as he led the disciples and other followers to be anything but the hero in their story. He did this by demonstrating humility, servanthood, and courage against Roman oppression. Each gave voice to the expression of God in our midst. And knowing that God is in our midst is the strongest expression of hope.

Harvard theologian and pastor, The Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman, gave voice to this. It is said that Thurman read and prayed Psalm 139 every day. Why? Could it be a spiritual practice dedicated to obedience? Was the good Rev. tapping into the resource that scripture provides for sustenance that cries one for the journey or was he reminding himself that a present God responds to the request to “search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts.” The notion is that only in honesty can we know the Holy Other and only in honesty can we be fully known. Intimacy is a key that the Lenten Discipline brings to us as a gift. In response to the Psalm [Thurman writes](#):

"When I have been lost from my way, and the thick fog has shrouded from my view the familiar path and the lights of home, when with deliberate intent, I have turned my back on truth and peace, when in the midst of the crowd, I have taken refuge from the strangers, when things to do have peopled my days with mounting anxiety and ever-deepening frustration, when in loneliness, I have sat in the thicket of despair, too weak to move, to lift the head, Thou hast searched and found me. I cannot escape Thy scrutiny. I would not escape Thy love. Thou hast searched me and known me."

Thurman's query pours in truth and reminds me that maybe I have heard this before from seminary days:

- Neo-Orthodox theologian Paul Tillich writes in his book, *The Courage To Be* of the Shattered Illusion and the Work of the Cross- The Past is Approved – The Future is Wide Open – All is Good – You are Accepted.
- In her book *The Praxis of Suffering*, Rebecca Chopp, addresses the impact of oppression as a way towards justice, through the healing of both the oppressor and their victims.
- [Embrace what you hate and it will become the Christ for you](#). That moment when St. Francis has a deep spiritual experience with a leper.

All of these pieces have created a tapestry for me and connect me with this disturbing Lenten question about my embrace of the heroic. Oh, how I wish I could learn and it could wash over me.

- I serve a Savior but how many times did I try to “save” what is not mine to save?
- I have often wanted to be humble but sometimes, I am “proud” of my humility.

Isaiah offers for us another reminder in this week's Hebrew Tradition reading.

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,*

*so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

And yet, it is so easy to assume that God's thoughts are my thoughts, or even worse, that my thoughts ought to be God's! I don't have to be the hero in my own story, but in the words of Anne Lamont in her book *Help, Thanks, Wow*: "Here are the two best prayers I know: 'Help me, help me, help me' and 'Thank you, thank you, thank you.'" So there is hope that perhaps I will learn this spiritual discipline. And with those gifts, I am reminded to pray Psalm 139 with Howard Thurman.

Prayer

Artist of souls,
you sculpted a people for yourself
out of the rocks of wilderness and fasting.
Help us as we take up your invitation to prayer and simplicity,
that the discipline of these forty days
may sharpen our hunger for the feast of your holy friendship,
and whet our thirst for the living water you offer
through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Peace,



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