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November 22, 2020

Today's Gospel makes it really clear that a fundamental part of the Christian life is service. Jesus applauds and welcomes into the Kingdom those who feed and care for others: "I was hungry and you gave me food," he says. "I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."

There's no way around it. Acts of service are particularly blessed spaces. They are holy ground. And in a crazy world in the midst of a pandemic, we can be really glad that *something* stands apart as blessed space, that Jesus gives us a clear blueprint for meeting him face to face, for entering the Kingdom here and now. We know what we need to do.

But I have talked to enough good people who are so tired right now, so burned out, so anxious, that they don't feel they have the energy to do *one more thing*.

So we have to ask a serious question: *What if we have no mojo?*

What if you are a good person who loves Jesus and wants to do all those things, but you just are exhausted? You're feeling defeated. The cancelled vacations and the financial worries and the fear schools will close and maybe you're really your missing mainland family — what if you just don't feel up to doing *more* right now? What if *you* feel thirsty? *You* feel imprisoned? You feel stuck and you just have no mojo? What if you just feel burned out on trying to be a good person?

Mental health practitioners knew this was going to happen — they called it the “shadow pandemic.” They knew it would take its toll: the social distancing, the loneliness, the constant caretaking, the anxiety, the unemployment, the uncertainty. The news cycles. And as winter approaches, we all know — because we’ve been told — it is about to get harder.

At this point it is important I acknowledge that sometimes these dark feelings warrant sustained, ongoing support from professionals whose job it is to care for you and help you, and that in fact every therapist I know is busier than ever because a lot of people realize that this is really, really hard. So *please* seek that out if you need it. There is no shame in it; on the contrary, it takes some real courage.

But what about today? Maybe as you wait for an appointment or you pause to see if this is truly what you need, or if you don’t think that’s what you need, the question remains: *So what do we do?*

The Gospels are not meant to throw at us yet another to-do list. And if you don’t feel like you can or want to do what Jesus is encouraging in the gospels, then talk to him about it. This is all about relationship.

St. Ignatius would tell us to read this Gospel passage and then talk to God as you would to your closest friend. Be honest and raw. I often do this on walks with the dog or in the car, and I sometimes say some pretty rude things. It might surprise you to learn that I have a bit of an attitude. And you know what? I have never horrified God. *Not once.* I haven’t offended God and I haven’t made God blush. God is not the Queen of England. God is not your grandmother. God is not even your priest! God meets

us where we are at, but it is a whole lot easier when we actually show up as we are instead of as we think we should be.

You might pray with this passage and find yourself saying, “I don’t want to do those things today. I’m too tired/sad/angry. Ask someone else.”

Trust me, this is better than pretending you feel fine and faking it. Because it’s real. God gets it. And you’ll find this opens the conversation; it doesn’t shut it down. This is the beginning of God helping you.

The great writer Ann Lamott wrote an entire book about prayer and she lists just three prayers that you need to pray. The first is Help. By opening up a conversation with God that’s real, you are giving God an opportunity to really help you. (But if this idea of praying with the Gospel is too much simply say this to God: Help.)

Next, try to shift your attention from all that is wrong to just *one thing* that is good. Parenting experts tell us that whatever behavior in kids we comment upon the most is the behavior that will be repeated. Which means that if we notice and correct what they are doing wrong, they actually do more of that behavior. So the expert advice is to praise the good behavior because that’s actually what you want to see more of. The same is true for life. Rob Voyle says, in his great work on Appreciative Inquiry, “What you focus on becomes your reality.” What we pay attention to, what we focus on, what we dwell on — *becomes very powerful*. So make sure you focus on the good.

This is essentially Ann Lamott’s second prayer: Thank You. There is grace abundant around us; sometimes we just don’t see it. Ask God to shift your focus to the good stuff.

The third prayer Ann Lamott suggests is Wow. This is actually the title of her book: *Help, Thank You, Wow*.

Now, if you are starting to feel skeptical, I can tell you all that I practiced these things just to make sure Ann Lamott was indeed on the right track. And what I found was that when I did Help and Thank You, the Wow came spontaneously.

When I ask God to help me see what I am grateful for, I do not run through my usual list, like “roof over my head, my kids, blah blah blah” but rather moments come to mind I otherwise might have overlooked. And a few were suddenly before me:

The first was about a week ago when a timer went off in the kitchen after dinner, and Kerith announced that it was time to see how the light was falling on our lawn here. Christmas service will be outside this year, and she was checking to see when the lawn is too dark to be safe for some of our older members.

A few days later, I returned from a walk with our dog to find Kerith and Jean Fiddes scurrying about, masked, trying to figure out how to plan for Outdoor Christmas. How many would come? Would people stay home because of the pandemic? We usually get 300 people; would we even get half? How will we know? How can we plan for such an unknown? Where will we put them?

A few days later I saw through my dining room window a troubling sight: a man, poking around in the bushes with what appeared to be a tape measure. *Um, who's that?* I naturally asked. “Bill Bonnett,” she assured me. “He is measuring the lawn to determine how many socially distanced chairs we can have for Christmas.” (I feel I should tell you now that he was very deep in

the bushes so if you don't want your family sitting IN the bushes on Christmas, I suggest you start being nice to Bill now.)

And suddenly I saw *all these people* in action to make sure we can have a nice Christmas, even during a pandemic. That *you* can have a nice Christmas. That *I* can have a nice Christmas. It's really something. Behind the scenes, invisible to all who don't live where I live. Invisible almost to me, and I saw it with my own eyes! And then other images came too mind: Trudy every Friday at the food pantry and the Santiago, Guard and Mounts families who are pulling together to offer 150 Thanksgiving meals on Friday to the local community. John, changing out my busted toilet.

And in a new way I saw that we are a team. We are a community, of course, but we are also a team. Discipleship is not an individual sport. People are showing up to do helpful things. It is amazing. Truly, I am amazed at their mojo.

No one needs to have mojo every day. No one does. So take your exhaustion to Jesus and lay it at his feet. Let him carry it. Then tell him you need help shifting your attention to what is good and meaningful.

Even though you may have no energy, there are those who do right now, and *they will carry you*. Because we are a team. And that's how all teams work.

So often the industriousness of the few makes the rest of us feel guilty. Instead, let's *marvel* at what they are doing. Let's be amazed by them. Because once we do, we too are standing on holy ground. *We too* get invited into the Kingdom along with them. By bearing witness, we are joining them.

Only with God can a conversation that begins with *Help* end with *Wow*.

My friends, we really are loved.

Amen.