

PSALM 33:1-9

Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous. Praise befits the upright. Praise the Lord with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings with loud shouts.

For the word of the Lord is upright and all his work is done in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth. He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle; he put the deeps in storehouses.

Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spoke and it came to be; he commanded and it stood firm.

ACTS 3:1-10

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayers, at 3:00 in the afternoon. And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple.

When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. Peter looked intently at him as did John, and said, "Look at us." And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

All the people saw him walking and praising God. And they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what happened to him.

CHANGING FOCUS

Psalm 33:1-9
Acts 3:1-10

A university professor passed out a writing exercise to her students. It consisted of only a black dot in the center of a piece of white paper. She then asked the students to write a few sentences to describe what they saw. Once everyone was finished, the professor collected the pages and began reading to the class what they had written.

Not surprisingly they each wrote about the black dot, its size and its position on the paper. Some were very creative, one writing about the dot being a portal to the universe. What they all shared in common was that each of them wrote about the black dot. But what was interesting was that no one wrote about the white part of the paper—that which underlies the whole.

I think we are all pretty adept at seeing the trees and losing sight of the forest. Understandably, our focus is usually on the dark dots, the problems we are struggling to work out, our physical aches and pains, our relationship conflicts, stuff going on at school or work.

Do you imagine that a Change in Focus would help? What if our awareness shifted from the black dots to the all-encompassing white part of the page? What if we stopped listening for a while to the relentless fear mongering chatter of our minds warning us to watch out for this or to beware of that? What if instead we interrupted our inner monologue to embrace the sacredness of the moment we are living in—right here, right now—and what it has to offer us? Because in this moment, we sit on this sacred planet resting in the depths of the universe. There are elements, gases and liquids combining and intertwining in such a way that new galaxies are being formed. In this moment, the sacred sun shines down on this living planet we call home. The Earth is spinning in such a way that the warmth of the sun blesses us all. In this moment, trees reach for the light, rivers and streams flow, the ocean tides rise and fall. In this moment, seeds slowly awaken to their greatness and burrow into soil that has been

accumulating nutrients since the beginning of time. In this moment, animals, insects and our brothers and sisters live, breathe and have their being.

There is this magical existence everywhere, all around us and also within us. In this very moment, cells are dividing within us, blood is flowing, ideas are generating, atoms are thriving. And it is all happening as I speak.

That's the white part of the paper, is it not? The psalmist bears witness to it: *Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous...For the Lord is upright and all his work is done in faithfulness...By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth. He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle; he put the deeps in storehouses...Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.*

Changing our focus to the bigger picture allows us to access all of the same power and creativity that made everything. You must focus on your connection to the Source of the forest rather than just the trees. That opens us to solutions rather than obsessing about the problems. The black dots are not all that is. Hardly!

The story in Acts which I read this morning holds up for us an example of what an expanded awareness might accomplish. The man who was born lame was focused entirely on that black dot which we would not wish on anyone. He believed that his survival depended upon the alms he might receive at the Beautiful Gate. Why, you might ask, could he believe otherwise? (We'll get back to him in a moment).

Now let's see Peter and John's response to his request for alms. *They looked intently at him and said, "Look at us."* I wonder what kind of a look that was. It must have been one of caring and concern because the man expected an offering from them. *But Peter said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you"* at which point the man probably said to himself, "Oh darn, I'm not getting anything from them. What's he going to give me—a crust of bread?" But Peter said, *in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.* And with a little help, the man did.

Now observe the Change in Focus demonstrated by both parties. Peter and John dismissed the man's request for financial aid. They did not focus on the problem, but rather on the solution. That opened them to the healing powers made available by the Spirit. And in order for the man to walk and even leap, he too had to Change his Focus from seeing himself as an invalid to a person who was now whole. And that is not an easy shift in focus to make.

But this is the white part of the page which supports the entire universe and multiverses that might exist. All well and good, but what is it we must do to access it? Good question! I will answer it this way: After the first Great War, Lawrence of Arabia brought some of his friends who were sheikhs to England to entertain them and thank them for their support during the war. On the last night, Lawrence offered them any gift they wanted to take back to the desert with them. They took him up to their hotel room and into the bathroom where they pointed to the faucet of the bathtub that provided them with constant running water. Of course, being from the desert, the object of their fancy was the running water, not the faucet itself. They did not understand that behind the faucet was a whole plumbing system that was resourced to an immense reservoir. They saw a black dot, but they did not see the white paper.

So how do we ourselves tap into that reservoir and establish the proper connections to get the water flowing? Changing our Focus from problems to solutions is the first step. The next is disciplined prayer and meditation. Our breath is the conduit we use. In Hebrew, the word for breath is *nephesh* which is also the same word for "Spirit." So when we mindfully and quietly concentrate on our breath, we enter the realm of Spirit where answers can be found. You must be disciplined and you must be patient. And when an answer arrives—and it will—then you must act. So let us all now take a deep breath, hold it for a few seconds and then let it go.

Reverend Thomas Dunlap, November 14, 2021