

THE REASSURANCE OF GOD

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Haslett Community UCC

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(Began with brief explanation of similarity of this reading from Luke with the Matthew "Sermon on the Mount.)

What is the hardest thing for you about being a Christian? Is it living according to God's laws? Is it faithfully serving in a church? Is it being a minority in society? Is it believing in Jesus' divinity—his life, death and resurrection? Is it "loving" your enemies? None of these things is easy, of course. But perhaps the most difficult thing about being a Christian is to trust—trust that God truly is present and active and truly does care about all of us.

This might be one way to think of how God sees us. Think back to the last time you held an infant in your arms. What could you do for that baby? What could it do for you? The answers are pretty simple: you met its most basic needs— you gave it food, water, dry warm clothes, and you held it close and tenderly. The baby could only respond by showing it was comfortable, or by wailing loudly, or by sleeping peacefully in the curve of your neck.

You were once that baby. Can you imagine it? You had no control over anything in your life, but could only cry out and hope for someone to take care of you. And

someone or ones did. You had little choice but to trust in that care. And, maybe contrary to your own illusions, you still have little choice but to trust.

The problem is, though, that as we grow, we discover our own abilities and hone them through the years, becoming more and more convinced that we can darn well take care of ourselves. Then Life hits us smack dab in the face, probably more than once!

Suddenly you can't really trust yourself, you can't always trust those you love, you can't trust the structures of society. No one comes to the rescue; no one bails you out; no one seems to know the answers—not the school, not the church, not the government.

There **are** no easy answers, just maybe some substances that help dulled the pain and feelings of helplessness.

The teacher, the doctor, the minister, the council person, the judge, the governor, the Congress person, the President, the United Nations. Not even Drs. Phil, Laura and Ruth! No one has the answers, though there are always those who stand to make a profit by convincing you they do.

This is often when we turn in desperation and say, "Lord, teach us to pray." And that's the second hardest thing: praying. It doesn't need to be, but somehow most of us think it is.

Some of you are aware that I am a spiritual director, a practice you may not be familiar with. Dating from the very early church, certain men and women were gifted as special spiritual companions, listeners, directors, especially as monasteries and convents sprung up all over Europe and the Middle East. In the early times, particularly for those

in Holy Orders, these persons truly were “directors”, dictators even--teaching, leading, prodding, disciplining, those under their care. In the past 50 years or so, the practice has revived and is becoming known throughout mainline Protestant circles as well as Roman Catholic. There are study programs available where one learns the history of spiritual direction, as well as ways to be an effective director oneself. The closest one locally is at St. Francis Retreat Center in DeWitt, an ecumenical training program which takes two years to complete. A spiritual director always has a director, as well, and is not a guru or expert, but rather a companion on the spiritual journey.

As a director, I primarily listen, with the ears of my body, heart and soul, as others share with me their spiritual concerns, dilemmas, confusions, amazements, joys, miracles, you name it. It is like being a witness to the deepest, most sacred concerns of another’s heart. What I hear more frequently than any other issue is the struggle with prayer—how, when, where, how often, and sometimes, why. So if you struggle with prayer, you’re certainly not alone. People read countless books and articles, go on retreats and take courses to find THE answer. But there is no easy answer here either.

Let’s assume that we don’t just intellectually believe in this God idea. It’s not just a thing in our heads. Let’s assume God is real and is our life line. Let’s assume that we desire to “know” and “be known” by God. So how do you get to know anyone? You meet and begin a conversation, sometimes slowly and hesitantly, eventually growing more comfortable and confident in the relationship. There are countless ways to do it,

just as there are countless ways we relate with human beings whom we love. That's prayer: attending to the most important relationship there is. It doesn't so much matter what you say, what you feel, what you're afraid of, what your uncertainty is. What matters is that you desire to communicate. God will hear that; God will honor that; God will respond. And the two of you go on from there. Long stretches of ignoring God will never mean you can't start again.

Jesus says, keep asking, keep searching, keep knocking. Be persistent and insistent. If God **seems** absent, that won't last. After all, just where would God go? But, God is mysterious and unpredictable. We cannot control God. Nevertheless, God longs to show you that you are beloved. God longs for your love in return. God says, "Be still and know that I am God." So let us do just that. (I invited people to close their eyes as I led them through a short meditation with silence between each phrase.)

"Be still and know that God is God." "Be still and know that God is." "Be still and know."
"Be still." "Be."

Thank you, Lord, for teaching us to pray.

Amen.