Pentecost Proper 12A
Peace, Seattle
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Romans 8:26-39
Audrey Zemke

Over 20 years ago I was diagnosed with cancer. After the surgery as I lay in my hospital room in the dark with the nighttime sounds of the hospital around me. Visiting hours were over and I felt very alone. I didn't know anything specific about my cancer. I didn't really know anything about cancer….yet. What I thought I knew scared me.

This week in Norway, the bombing of a government building in Oslo and the senseless killing of kids at a camp on an island nearby makes me wonder in disbelief why something so heinous could happen. We aren't truly alone in life. I had Norm and family and friends. The people in Norway have families and friends. And we have God. In the 26th verse of chapter 8 of Romans it says that "the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs to deep for words". We have the Holy Spirit interceding for me.

So who is the Holy Spirit? Yes, I said who, not what. We remember the wind and the flames at Pentecost when first he appears to the believers. Yet he is more than a special effects show. The Holy Spirit is a person, one of the three parts of the Trinity. When I was growing up, we called him the Holy Ghost. The Holy Spirit is present in us. Before Jesus died on the cross, he told the disciples that the Counselor would come to them after he went away. He dwells in all believers now. The Holy Spirit is the shy violet of the trinity. He acts on our behalf.

In My Grandfather's Blessings by Rachel Naomi Remen, Rachel who suffers from Crohn's disease starts having mysterious, frightening symptoms. Over a series of several months, the symptoms grow frequent and more severe. She continues to visit her doctors regularly because she doesn't know what else to do. As time wears on and there is no explanation, Rachel stops telling them about the unusual things she is experiencing because she feels they don't want to hear about them.

Things continue to worsen and she begins to be very afraid of what is happening to her. She makes an appointment with a colleague, a surgeon. The appointment time scheduled is only 15 minutes because of the rules of her health plan. She almost doesn't go because she wonders what she can really discover that she hasn't before in only 15 minutes time. Other physicians have already spent hours with her.

After reading her chart for a few minutes the doctor says, "Tell me why you have come." The doctor looks genuinely concerned so Rachel begins telling him all the things she is experiencing. She then begins to tell him other things, her fears, her anxieties. The whole story takes just 8 or 9 minutes. He validates her concerns and tells her that lab studies have ruled out anything life threatening but that something is going on that they don't understand. He promises to walk along side with her while whatever it is declares itself. Several months later an abscess develops that is able to be surgically removed. The doctor offered his caring and compassion and in fourteen minutes lifted her from her loneliness. Perhaps that's who the Holy Spirit is to us; someone to be with us in our trials and infirmities.

The Holy Spirit is just part of our connection to God. Romans 8 reaffirms God's relationship with us. He chose us to make us holy. God secures us a place with him after we die. What peace of mind! This may not be revolutionary thinking for us. We have seen the writings in the Bible that

tell us this in many places. The people Paul was writing to were in the middle of a debate of who were Christians and thus saved those who followed the Law or those who believe in the Good News of Jesus. Paul says that no one can be saved by his own efforts. God is the way.

Another place in the Bible where we hear of God's promise for us is in the Psalms. God hasn't forgotten his covenant with us, the covenant he made with Abraham and Jacob. In Psalm 105, we hear praise which recites God's history with us. It calls us to praise God for his actions throughout history from Abraham to the exodus from Egypt. It calls us to praise him for his promise to share in the full harvest of glory when life ends. This hope helps us to cope with anything in this life.

In the hospital laying in my bed in the dark, I took a Bible next to me and turned to Psalms. I started singing the psalms as was the tradition at the church I was attending. I found kinship with people of God before me who had written and recited these same words that expressed what I felt. I knew I had a God who would listen.

So neither cancer nor sorrow nor death of those close to us nor senseless violence separates us from the love of God. I hope you can find peace and love in the tough times in your life through the Holy Spirit.
Amen.