

## **We Got You**

**Rev. Sarah Campbell**

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I want to invite you into your right brain this morning if you aren't already there. Much of our church life is right brain activity. Though you'd rather the left brain predominate in building issues, like fixing the boiler, and in accounting, and in all of the organizing it takes to make this enterprise cohere, run, thrive. But our faith formation program and our worship?!, this is right brain stuff all the way.

There used to be a slogan for churches like ours a couple of decades ago, "Come worship here, where you don't have to leave your brain at the door." What about this instead? "Come worship here, where you may leave your left brain at the door."

In recent decades, neurologists have discovered that the right hemisphere of the brain is essential to the creation and experiencing of poetry, music, religion. Karen Armstrong writes: "It is involved with the formation of our sense of self and has a broader, less focused mode of attention than the left hemisphere, which is more pragmatic and selective. Above all, it sees itself as connected to the outside world, whereas the left hemisphere holds aloof from it. Specializing in language, analysis and problem solving, the left side of our brain suppresses information that it cannot grasp conceptually. The right hemisphere, however, whose functions tended in the past to be overlooked by scientists, has a holistic rather than an analytical vision, it sees each thing in relation to the whole and perceives the interconnectedness of reality. It is, therefore at home with metaphor, in which disparate entities become one, while the left hemisphere tends to be literal and to wrest things from their context so that it can categorize and make use of them."

Our modern focus on the empirical and objective insights provided by the left brain has unquestionably been of immense benefit to humanity. (Hence the privileging of science in our educational systems.) It is the left hemisphere that will soon provide us with a vaccine for the coronavirus and clean energy planes. But we also need to cultivate the other half of our mental capacity for whole sight and full living. The humanities, religion, story, ritual, music, prayer, worship and the school of the heart, our faith formation program. This is all right brain activity.

We often say at Mayflower before we read scripture: "We don't know if it actually happened this way, but we know the story is true."

Children, youth, everyone!, what do you suppose this means? We don't know if it actually happened this way, but we know the story is true. Understanding this can save your life...

Could it be that the first part of this phrase is left brain and the second part is right brain? We don't know if it actually happened this way, but we know the story is true...

Take this morning's bible story for example--the healing story about the person who couldn't walk.

We don't know if it actually happened this way.... or if the story changed considerably as it was told through the years, like a "fish story", before it was finally written down some fifty years after Jesus death... or if it was a composite of several stories about Jesus healing people.

We don't know if it actually happened this way... if this human actually couldn't walk for physiological reasons, or if it was some kind of psychological paralysis, a deep depression and he just couldn't move through life. We may very well and for good reason doubt that someone could actually be cured, without medical intervention, of physical disability or paralysis.

But what really happened doesn't matter. You don't have to believe that it actually, factually, physically, medically, happened, as if someone could have captured it all on their smart phone, for the story to tell us something so true about life, something we can't live without.

But we know the story is true... Now we enter the the great mysterious, the oneness ad interconnectedness, the right brain stuff...

We know the story is true... We know healing happens, maybe not full, physical cure, but healing happens when our friends won't give up on us. Remember the story? The suffering one's eyes fill with tears thinking he would never walk again. "It's okay, just take me home." "No" his friends say. "We won't give up on you". We got you, we see you, we hear you, we'll protect you, we'll pray for you, we won't give up on you.

We know the story is true...

We know that all good things work together for healing- access to high quality health care, excellent docs and nurses, surgery, drugs, science, but also all of the ways of healing that are beyond the reach of science, kindness, comfort, access to nature, deep breathing, good food, good thinking, support. Everything together affects our health and healing!

We know the story is true...

We know that loneliness is as bad for our health as smoking and obesity. And that community saves.

We know the story is true... that when someone tells us that they won't give up on us, that they'll be praying for us, that they got us, that this affects us, the cells in our body. I know a theologian, a biblical scholar, a critical thinker, not a literalist, who was anxiously awaiting an upcoming major surgery; and he shared how touching it was to know that people were praying for him. It gave him strength and courage and hope. He said, "the locker room attendant in the health club I frequent stunned me by looking me in the eye and saying, 'God will be with you and I'll pray for you every day.'"

And we also know that it feels good to pray for someone when someone is on our heart, and to share this burden with God, to lay our burdens down... by speaking their name, aloud or the silence of our hearts during worship, or stopping into a church and lighting a prayer candle or holding them in prayer, whatever that means to you, throughout the week... even telling them: "We'll pray for you. We got you" ... this feels so good and right, even if our left brain doesn't completely understand how it works...

We know that prayer and meditation-- like the three that we are offering for our Lenten spiritual practices, choose one or all, breath prayer, centering prayer, welcoming prayer--that they deepen our breathing, rest and calm our mind, relax our body. These prayers can have a profound impact on our own health and on the health of those around us.

We know the story is true...We know more and more, in this age of relativity physics, about how much we don't know about the mystery of how everything is interconnected.

I'm not trying to persuade you. Or make a rational case for prayer. Or defend bible stories about healing.

I *am* inviting you to open to the right side of your brain and allow yourself some release. You don't have to know how prayer actually works. But there's something in the human being that needs to pour out one's deepest longings and feelings to God, to being itself, to the universe.

*The heart needs to express itself.*

That's what Larry Turner used to say. Larry, one of the saints of this church, an engineer for 40 years at Honeywell, a left brain worker, he had also developed his right brain through the years. At his death bed, I asked if he wanted to pray. (Not everyone wants a spoken prayer. Some prefer to sit together in silence.) He knew he was dying so the prayer wasn't about reversing this. Afterall, mortality is a given in life. "Yes", he said, "Prayer. The heart needs to express itself". We both spoke words of prayer. His were words of gratitude. Not sure if my memory is exact. But Larry spoke of great gratitude, something like: "My heart is filled with overwhelming love." It was a healing prayer, even at the time of death.

Children of God,

One of the most ancient ways of offering a prayer to God, was to light a candle. Is there someone you know who is sick? Or hurting? Someone who is lonely or afraid? Is there someone close to you for whom you would like to offer a prayer? Or maybe you would like to offer a prayer for yourself? If you are afraid... or sad... or sick in some way...

There are candles stations around the sanctuary... during the rest of this worship service, if you wish to light a candle you may do so. While you light the candle you can whisper your prayer or say it inwardly, or simply say their first name.

During communion, there will also be anointing stations, another ancient way of praying for God's healing. After you receive communion, you may come forward to be anointed. You can share or not share with the anointer what your prayer is.

Let us drop more deeply into our time of worship. Let us shift more fully into our right brain....

### **Sources**

Armstrong, Karen, The Lost Art of Scripture, Rescuing the Sacred Texts. Knopf, 2019.

Hewitt Suchocki, Marjorie, Theological Reflections on Prayer: in God's Presence, Chalice Press, 1996, ( a process theological reflection on prayer)