

"To Be or Not To Be" Traci Hubbard

February 5, 2012

It's a strange tragedy. A regular Jewish Joe seeks out his people's greatest prophet to inquire if he knows where his lost donkeys are and the answer he receives is, "Don't worry your donkeys are fine and oh yea! You're the new King of Israel". Splash splash went the anointing oil. Saul runs back home and hides without telling anyone the news and here is where we see his fatal flaw. We know that Saul was tall and built like Fort Knox on the outside so everyone assumed he was strong on the inside. However, what lived within the King was revealed when Samuel the prophet appears to announce the news. "Hail to your new King Saul!" Some of Saul's buddies in the crowd laugh out loud and mock him because they know what others think is humility and modesty, they see clearly as fear, insecurity and weakness. These hidden qualities and Saul's refusal to execute his role lead him into a living hell of jealousy, paranoia, despair and death by his own hands. The secret of success is making wise decisions, even when the odds are against us and no one else may understand why we are making our choices. The promise of the Sacred has always been, if we believe in the heart of the Holy, like a child believes in the heart of their parent, we do not have to understand their reasons to bow and live into a hope that will not disappoint which is all God asks of us to be is for the highest good of all.

I met Beth in May 2006 while I was managing a retail store. She was a 15 year old five foot tall articulate sprite that had one of the strongest wills I had ever encountered. I wondered, after I hired her and she rose to excellence and leadership in every task I assigned to her, I wondered, why she was so sad. Now, Beth didn't act sad, she wore a mask of fun and invincibility. But when I took her out for coffee and conversation, I realized how desperate and wounded the sprite of our store really was. Through the years, Beth has called upon me when she could not find her way out of the dysfunction of an abusive family system, drugs and alcohol. Last June, Beth called and we began to meet weekly over breakfast as we discussed the latest psychology book she was reading for herself and as a healer because she studies and works in the field of social work. Beth does not have to crack a book to make an "A". Her intellect is sharp, so sharp that it divides her from making sane choices. If she lives into the truth of her past and present, with hope for a future she has dreamed of living, she fears her family will be hurt because she told the truth in order to heal herself. Beth's fear of innocently hurting others who have responsibility for her wounds have taken her hostage to a vortex that recently spun out of control. Last week, Beth asked me to accompany her to see her physician and to be her advocate so she could honestly begin her journey out of the desert that she and selfish others have created. When I asked her what she wanted to be when we walked out of the doctor's office into the parking lot, she said, "I want to be awake to my life" and she cried tears of hope. It is going to be a hard journey and I am in

it for as long as it takes Beth to come to a place where she is able to share about the hope she lived into during her desert experience.

Shakespeare and spirituality have much in common. Both are full of the dualities we all face at one time or another in our lives, love and hate, birth and death, war and peace, staying or leaving, fighting or forgiving, courage or fear. In William Shakespeare's Hamlet, Prince Hamlet's father has been murdered by his brother, Claudius. Hamlet knows this because the ghost of his father appears to him and reveals that his brother has murdered him and he demands that his son avenge his death. Claudius has become the King, and Hamlet is driven to madness because he refuses to make a decision. Time passes and Hamlet remains in a self-made prison of indecision, believing his neutrality keeps him safe from any harm that he might endure by confronting Claudius. Instead of deciding to be or not to be obedient to his father's request, he begins to play a game with his uncle. He pretends that he is going crazy so Claudius will send him away to England where he hopes to find actors to stage a play where his Claudius will innocently be revealed as his father's murderer and Hamlet will not be the whistle blower. This play is infamously called "The Mouse Trap". What happens to Hamlet, his mother, and many others in the end, is what happens to all of us when we live in indecision. Hamlet was caught in the trap of madness and despair, lies and folly, and as a result of his refusal to decide to move forward, he remained chained to his question, "to be or not to be", and lived into a self-made trap of despair that cost him his life. Coleridge writes, "His enormous intellectual activity prevents him from instant action and the result is delay and irresolution." Hamlet is Aristotle's definition of a tragic hero. His tragic flaw is his delay in action and irresolution that depends on the nature of self-analysis.

What is a tragic flaw? What are our tragic flaws and how are we destroyed by them? Or, what are our tragic flaws and how can we recognize them and address them with honesty and hope? In other words, how can we turn our weaknesses into strengths, our despairs into hope, the moments where we feel like giving up and dying to a relationship because it's too hard into humility and perseverance? How can we pick ourselves up and begin again when we have been knocked down too many times by the same person or situation? How can we face the future with joy when our children are leaving the nest and we realize we have lost ourselves and our connection with our partners because all of our energies were given to our children? How can we face the future when we find it difficult to walk and our pain has greatly limited what we can do? How can we make decisions to be people of hope when life is forcing us to transition to assisted living where living a life alone appears even lonelier than being surrounded by the familiar? How can we keep moving forward when we are tired and afraid of what may come? I believe the answer lies in the lessons of my young friend Beth, Hamlet, throughout the Scriptures and in our own experiences. When we look at the lessons of our past choices and then look at the choices in front of us, we are learning how to be. And when we decide to be or not to be what is needed to bring life, not death, hope, not despair, love, not hate to the present moment, we are becoming like the One who

created us. Thankfully, the author of Psalm 42 and 43 teaches us how to be and how not to be.

The Story of Psalms 42 and 43

Most Theologians believe these two psalms began as one psalm. The Jews divided them into two psalms about 200 years before the birth of Jesus when they translated their Bible from Hebrew into Greek. We do not know who wrote these psalms. What we do know about the author is:

Psalm 42

- in the past he went to the house of God in Jerusalem (verse 4)
- he can not go there now (verse 2)
- he hoped that one day he would go back to it (verse 5)
- he was now 200 kilometres north of Jerusalem (verse 6)
- his enemy had taken him away from his home (Psalm 43:1).

King Jehoash of Israel took many people from Jerusalem and Judah and held them hostage in the mountains of Hermon in Israel. The story is in 2 Kings 14:14.

A hostage is someone that is not free. His enemy catches him. He puts him in a place that feels like a prison. The enemy lets the hostage out only when the enemy gets what he wants. Maybe the hostage in the psalm was a Levite from the temple, the house of God. Levites were God's servants in the temple. He may have been one of the "sons of Korah". Psalm 43 tells us that the author was a servant of God or perhaps a Levitical priest.

The *first lesson* we see is that we have hope when we do not lose our thirst for God. The hostage has seen a "hart", a male deer thirsty and drinking water as he is being dragged across the desert by his enemy. When we are in a desert in our souls, when life has become a prison, either by our own doing or the doings of another, if we remember to thirst and call out to God, we will be quenched. A beautiful lady in our congregation invited Jennifer and I to join her for lunch last week where she lives in an assisted living accommodation. After lunch and some heart tugging conversation where we witnessed her loves and her losses, her joy and her despair, we knelt beside her, holding her hand and we prayed for her. When the prayer ended she looked at us and said, "It's as though heaven was raining down on me, softly, while you were praying". As we walked out her door, she pointed out a picture on the wall directly across from her bed. The picture was a man standing on a small island in the middle of a river in front of a vast expanse of mountains. She said, "You see that man? That's my husband and he is waiting for me to join him and I am so looking forward to that day". Despite being separated from her children and grandchildren who try and visit her when they have time, this lady chooses

to be focused on hope and reunion, not death and loneliness. Like the Psalmist, though her soul is sad, she remembers when she worshipped with us at church and when she held her husband's hand and so she feeds her soul the things of God that no person, circumstance or thing can steal from her. Like Hamlet, we become crazy people when we give ourselves over as hostage by choosing not to remember what gives us hope.

Another lesson we may learn today is that the turning part of this grand lady's life and of the psalmist's life is where they both decide to call God "Lord". In verse 42:8 the author, like our lady, discovered that no matter where they were, God was still with them and they could call him "Lord" which only friends of God would feel comfortable saying.

And another wonderful lesson is just because we state what is true for us and we remember to trust the One who created us, it does not mean that we are left without questions or contradicting feelings that may come and go (Ps. 42:9&10). The beauty of the author recording his relationship with God during a desert experience is that we can clearly see that being in an intimate relationship with God is what makes space for honest conversation and questions such as, "Where are you when I feel misunderstood, desperate and hurt?"

Then, we see another life giving lesson when the author reminds us to go back to what we believe and make decisions out of that sacred space within us all. At the end of Psalm 42 & 43 he repeats verse 42:5 when he reminds himself to hope and be sure that he will praise God again and others will see his hope realized by the countenance of his face.

The last lesson I want to point out today is in Psalm 43. How has asking God to vindicate us ever helped us? Doesn't God seem silent when people create cases against us that are not true? I believe the lesson the author is trying to teach us is that in the right time, God will reveal what is holy and the light of the powerful presence of God will allow people to discern right from wrong, truth from lies. So while we are in our deserts, we will find freedom by praying for God to lead our enemies to a place, to an experience of awareness, or to a church like Living Spirit where loving wise ones are ready to patiently welcome Claudius, Hamlet, Beth and those of us who are trapped and need to see the light of hope. Once we realize that we are always free to choose to be healers instead of stealers, holy instead of self-righteous, awake instead of asleep, alive instead of dying, then the promise is we will not merely see, but we will realize and live into our hope. We will dance in our excitement as we understand and cherish the growth and strength we have acquired in our desert experiences. When we realize that God is always with us, in assisted living and hospices, in mansions on Lake Bonavista or in Elboya, in relational prisons or in deep depression and drug induced escapes...when we realize that God is always with us and if we chose to be people of hope, daring to do the hard and lonely work of hope, we will not be disappointed.

Romans 5:3-5: And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Beth believes that she is in prison and I am in her life to remind her that there is no prison where her Creator does not have the key. Beth is choosing to be her key holder and she is discovering that she is on a faith journey. Hamlet chose to play a game, believing he could live somewhere between TO BE and NOT TO BE and he lost his life. Our lady at lunch chooses to be true to her past, her present and her future by choosing gratitude and hope and she finds her life in the Sacred every day.

When we choose to thirst for the things of God to fill us, we will become like the nature of the Holy who fill us and as we dance in celebration, let us not forget to share our adventures with the Sacred so others may learn to be filled with hope. Will we choose mouse traps or life, this is our question. A young business man went to an older business man and was seeking advice – he asked, "What is the secret of success?" The older man replied, "Making wise decisions." The young man then asked, "How can I learn to make wise decisions?" The older man replied, "From experience." The young man then asked, "How do I get experience?" The older man answered, "From making dumb decisions."

Namaste.

HAMLET

A monologue from the play by William Shakespeare

HAMLET: "To be, or not to be--that is the question:

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune

Or to take arms against a sea of troubles

And by opposing end them. To die, to sleep--

No more--and by a sleep to say we end

The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks

That flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consummation

Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep--

To sleep--perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub,

For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause. There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life.
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of th' unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprise of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action. -- Soft you now,
The fair Ophelia! -- Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins remembered."