

## God's Love – and a suggestion for a 'Lenten Discipline'.

By Donna Koziol

Forty years ago, having managed right royally to screw up my life – and the lives of those near and dear to me – I had a weird experience that though improbable-sounding, was exceptionally real for me.

One night, lying in bed, my soul – I suspect tortured and disgusted by the mess I'd made of my life – left my body (an attempt to escape? seek relief? go 'home?'). I found myself travelling through a dark place – no light, but warm, and 'textured'; a feeling like dense-piled, warm, black velvet. [Because it was completely black and warm, I thought perhaps I'd arrived in Hell... which I rather felt I deserved.]

I had no eyes or ears... but strangely, I could see and hear.

I was not alone there. This place was immeasurably vast – like space - and packed with other souls who seemed to draw to me like iron-filings to a magnet. They swarmed around me - inquisitive, agitated at my presence, and with a sense of urgency - insisting that I didn't belong there ...that I should leave! Those nearest, were deeply concerned for me. All the while, more and more animae were swooping in, joining the throngs surrounding me... and I began to feel a little afraid.

Suddenly they all stopped. Ceasing their clamour, they cringed back into the darkness as a great light appeared in the distance, pin-pointing me but fanning out - in a sort of reverse perspective - into a huge, wide blaze of light, in the centre of which, very wee and far away, was a figure coming towards me.

I KNEW it!

I recognized it!

It was as familiar to me, and as much a part of me, as I was to myself!

"Oh no!" I thought ...and was scared, for though the figure was tiny, I recognized and *knew* it, as I knew myself! [I feared I had landed in some sort of alternate universe, and was about to meet myself and self-implode (thinking of the Pauli Exclusion Principle in which no two things can occupy the same space).]

But as the figure drew nearer, I realized that it knew me *intimately* – completely – *better* and more deeply than I knew myself! It spread its arms wide to me, and suddenly I was cradled within them, enveloped by, bathed in LOVE!

I was safe.

I was home!

It didn't say anything – just held me, without judgment or condemnation; holding me in the sweet balm of empathy, compassion, and understanding. It knew everything about me, and *understood* - better than I - all that had brought me to this

pass. It held me, absorbing my pain, taking the burden of it into itself, and leaving me feeling 'washed clean'! I knew myself to be LOVED - such a depth of love as I had never before experienced - and through it all, imparted such an overwhelming sense of fondness and delight. He delighted in me! ...and had such confidence and faith, in me! ...and patience! ...that I would come right in the end.

When finally I had calmed down and was in perfect peace, He said to me "Everything will work out."

And then suddenly I was back in my earthly body, lying in bed.

This remains the most real, moving, and pivotal experience of my life. Recalling it still brings me to tears of joy and longing.

Unfortunately – painful and embarrassing as it is to admit - I wasn't instantly reformed. With all the hubris of youth, and the sense of self-entitlement typical in humankind, I thought that everything would work out the way *I* wanted it to.

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Hah!

It took at least a decade and lots of failure and heartbreak before I began to twig that God's time is not our time; and our plans are not God's.

That experience has never left me. Seldom does a day pass when I do not recall and be grateful for it. It has affected and shaped me in a way nothing else can touch. All I can think of to describe it is "The peace of God, which passes all understanding", and I cannot ever hear that blessing without wanting to weep for joy at the experience of God's love that was given to me, at a time when I least deserved it and most needed it.

I don't think I am alone in having had such an experience. Every so often I hear someone say "Everything will work out" ...and something in the way they say it makes me think "Ah-ha! They've been there too!"

I compose paeans, trying to capture/explain/give thanks for this knowledge I have of God's love. I fashioned a 'psalm' of my own [some of it plagiarized from the prayer book] expressing to God my thanks and hope:

*I come, God, not trusting in my own righteousness,  
but remembering always Your great love for us;  
Your empathy and compassion;  
Your patience and forgiveness.*

*The way You look for Truth deep within me  
And help me understand wisdom, secretly.*

*Instead of judging,*

*Confronting me with my faults and inadequacies,  
You reach out, gather me to you, and hold me  
Sharing and absorbing my pain.*

*Enveloped in Love, I know Your delight and faith in me  
And Your love fills me to overflowing.  
I long to share it with others!*

*So fill me with Your holy spirit,  
That I might see through Your eyes,  
Love with Your heart,  
Understand with Your compassion and mercy,  
And reaching out to others,  
Share Your delight and faith in them,  
And Your love, and joy, and peace.*

Mindful of the admonition that we are God's eyes and ears, hands and feet on Earth, I started to open my eyes and embrace all my senses, and share with God all my experiences of the sensory delights [colours, smells, tastes, textures, touch, sounds] of His creation. I found myself gazing in delight upon everything around me ...people, animals, plants, behaviours.

Slowly, I came to realize that rather than my showing God stuff, it was Him showing me! I began to see so much more... not just things - people, animals, plants - but feelings - pain, love, loneliness, heartbreak, confusion.... I found myself looking on them all with such love, delight, joy, and compassion, that I felt sometimes more like a conduit for God's love, and that He was teaching me to 'see through His eyes' and 'love with His heart'. I like to think that when in my own small way I reach out to others, I am able to share God's love and delight in & with them, despite it coming through the imperfect and wholly fallible vessel I am.

I still sometimes feel incredulous about some aspects of our faith. I continue to be assailed by doubts about what seems irrational - even though my experience has convinced me of the certitude of God, and of life beyond this earthly plane. I often feel a bit of a flake, inadequate in my faith because my belief is now coloured by my experience - when all about me are people whose faith is strong and unwavering without having had such an epiphany.

Perhaps mine is not a very great or tangible goal, but it is a compelling one. I feel as though a fire was lit in me to share God's love and delight; His forgiveness; His faith in, and compassion for us all: hug by hug, smile by smile, touch by touch, greeting by greeting. I long to help others feel un-judged, appreciated, trusted, and forgiven, liked, and *always... loved!*

I'd like to proffer a suggestion for something to try this Lent.

As you go through your days and nights, consciously share with God your experience of His creation - the things you see; the sounds you hear; tactile sensations; smells; tastes –

*Wow, God! Get a load of the taste of this ripe guava! Mmmmm-mmmm!";  
"Awwww! See the love that dad has ...fondly ruffling his son's hair!*

Welcome whatever presents itself to you. Seek to understand what you see/hear/etc. ... sans judgement. Somewhere along the line, you'll find that sharing is a two-way street, and that God is sharing with you His love, and delight in His creation, and through it, helping you come a little closer to knowing Him!

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