

Good morning. Thank you for listening to my spiritual story

I have had spiritual habits for much of my life, but my mind is jumpy, it doesn't do a good job of getting outside of itself. I think it is true that God and I have never really met during these sessions; I have been a lost sheep, and God through the Holy Spirit has come to me, made me close to him and a more complete human being Here goes.

Forty years ago I, lived in Jacksonville, Florida; I was 37 years old, a husband and a father of two children; and a member of, yes, St. Paul's Church. Two years earlier I had joined Northwestern Mutual as an insurance agent, a profession where your pay is 100% related to your sales. I trained well, learned my scripts, and despite my fear of failure, made Million Dollar Round Table my first year. I headed to New York City to attend the MDRT meetings. Among other presenters, was a speaker who showed a picture of his yacht and described insurance's role in estate planning. These meetings triggered my fear of failure. I came home convinced I wasn't smart enough for this business, and, with a feeling that somehow I didn't fit in.

My business and confidence slid. After two years of living on credit cards, I finally succumbed to the knowledge that I needed God. I sensed that my fall was caused by my exclusive ties to the world's values of sales, professional recognition, and yes, supporting my family. I started going to Wednesday luncheons at The First Baptist Church of Jacksonville with Betty Saunders of my office. On one Wednesday, Dr. Jerry Vines told the story of an impulsive Peter who asked Jesus if he could walk to him on the stormy waters of Sea of Galilee. Peter stepped out of the rolling boat and took several successful steps; then he saw the waves, became afraid, and began to sink; he called to Jesus to help him. Dr. Vines was talking directly to me. He said today many were like Peter, caught in the world and without God; and when they saw the waves, like Peter, they had hit bottom and were ready to be saved.

I knew that, and I am paraphrasing today's lesson, the spirit of God had come to me and would guide me and tell me what would come." I walked back to my office knowing that I must be ready for him.

The next Monday, a critical day in the insurance world, was when I got on the phone to complete my calendar of appointments. Instead, the opposite happened: folks called to cancel. I was unemployed. It was time. I drove to St. Paul's. Father Bob Bast was not there. Whew! Where St. Paul's driveway meets Atlantic Boulevard, our cars met. Father Bob asked. "Why are you here? I don't know why I am. I'm supposed to be at Baptist Hospital".

We sat in his office, talked about my career; I was impatient. "I know you want me to pray, but I must do this." Finally we were in the chapel. A parishioner had donated a kneeler, rail, alter and cross just last week: I was its first customer. Father Bob put his hands on my head and began to pray. It felt as if my shirt buttons had burst and poisonous gases had rushed from my chest. The Holy Spirit had replaced them with God's love. I was cleansed. I was on a mountaintop.

I didn't stay on the mountaintop. I continued my business with confidence and experienced its normal peaks and valleys. Clients became good friends. I did Dad things and enjoyed Cynnie and friends. I joined a Bible group. Today's lesson from Paul describes my spiritual attitude of this time. "Suffering produces endurance and endurance character and character hope." I believed faith was the source of my salvation, and it still is. I worked hard on faith. Faith focused on my own soul. I am ever grateful for the faith in God I gained and was sustained by friends in the South.

It was not until I came to our St. Paul's that I gradually learned to also live by Jesus's commandment: "that you love one another just as I have loved you . . ." and that Christian living was more than just my own salvation. I learned this in EFM-through readings and friends. However, I had to be readied for the EFM experience by the work of the Holy Spirit.

I moved North overloaded with self-absorption and needed a dose of God's discipline. My first summer in New Hampshire, I set out with a friend from

Jacksonville, Phil, on what was to be a ten day journey on the Appalachian Trail. Phil was younger and faster, and after half a day we separated. As I said, I was prideful and overestimated my readiness for this trip. Each of three days, I was given an experience of enforced humility. The first day it was acute dehydration and walking alone 'til midnight. The second day I was caught in a deluge of rain JUST as I was setting camp. Having made the rookie mistake of packing my tent in the bottom of my pack, I was forced to have all its contents drenched as I took them out and set them on the soaking ground while I dug out my tent.

That night I couldn't cook, and protein bars wouldn't go down. The third day I wasn't right. I forgot to eat breakfast. Having struggled the whole day eating nothing but blueberries, I reached the shelter site, but all I could see was a sign saying: "Riley Campsite: 12 miles". I sat down and stared at it, conused. A couple crossed my path, but quickly; the man came back. He said; "My wife and I don't believe you are quite with it." I mumbled something. Then he asked THE question: "Can I carry your pack to the lean-to?" I struggled with my pride, and then I said the words I would not have said before. "Yes, please". I lay shivering in my sleeping bag. They gave me hot soup and protein drink. They dried all my clothes around a fire. Micah and Jen surrendered themselves to my care. I had surrendered myself to their care. Through this couple, the Holy Spirit taught me that to be a fully giving Christian I must be humble and accept my vulnerability.

In 2013 the Holy Spirit awoke me on a walk up Moosilauke where suddenly my mind was flooded with thoughts of a recent article on refugees in Concord. "What a trial. Come to a huge country with no English, no understanding of American customs." The next Monday I was at Lutheran Social Services. On Wednesday I was in the apartment of four young, refugee sisters. The interpreter asked: "What do you want Terry to do for you?" They replied: "Teach us English and get us jobs." They called me "Teacher." I was honored. After much time, several resolved crises, and getting to know Cynn timer, they called me Terry. I had learned from my experience with Micah and Jen. I had learned the humility of giving and receiving. The oldest sister has become an American citizen, the youngest is studying at Job Corps. The middle two work and study English. Mike and Pam LaFond will agree that you will not find kinder and more genuine

young,women. I enjoy frequent suppers at the sisters' home. Our two families exchange dinners at major holidays and we enjoy trips throughout New Hampshire. In short, by God's grace, we have merged into one African / American family.

Based on our relationship, I have become involved with a local organization by coordinating assistance for African refugees. Volunteers drive New Americans to doctors and agencies, or they join a family by reading mail, teaching English and doing whatever comes up. St. Paul's people are the pioneers in this organization, and it pleases me that the UU Church will be joining us with a large group who will be working with several families who have particular needs. Should any of you wish the challenge and reward of working with people of a different culture but the shared values of acceptance and love, please consider joining this ministry of St. Paul's and see Joanne Gutt, Mike McKinney or me. We would appreciate your help.

Now, for the past four years I have been in and out of severe nerve pain in my mouth which also affects my ability to speak and eat. Since it began, I have been to each of St. Paul's healing services. At the last healing service, I was moved not to ask to be healed, but as Drew was preparing to place the oil on my head, I asked to be taught to understand my illness. What I think I was asking for was the Spirit to help me live life as well as I can in the pain-times. We are working on that.

I was 37 when the Holy Spirit first spoke to me. He knew that while I went to church, I was separated from God. Because I was in a vulnerable stage and my confidence was plummeting, he spoke to me in no uncertain terms. For the next twenty two years I lived by practicing faith and the knowledge of my own salvation. It wasn't until I came north to our St. Paul's that I learned the blessings of relating to people the way Jesus taught us to. However, it took a walk in the woods for the Holy Spirit to teach me the humility that has allowed me the valuable relationships I have recently enjoyed. He knew I was an unfinished work and we stayed together, and I grew. At age 77, he and I are working on the next step: learning to handle discomfort with grace.

