Healing the Whole Person Retreat Reflections

I routinely thought of my relationship with Jesus as being on “speaking terms.” We were in touch and communicated but I didn’t trust him as a close friend. Over the years I had learned not to expect more out of my relationship with God, too much loss, too many trials, and the overarching question, “Where were you in my suffering, when I needed you most? Do you really care about me?” And I was tired. Tired of seeking relief from emotional burdens which had accumulated over a period of years.

These sentiments accompanied me as I entered into the Healing the Whole Person retreat last October. As the retreat team led us to explore our hearts, I realized I had so much fear and mistrust of God. Into this space, the Lord began to speak. He brought to mind images: a past job, a supportive friendship, a former living situation and the warm people I lived with, etc. I felt the Lord showing me how my past sufferings overshadowed my ability to see his gift in each of these beautiful things in my life. It also allowed me to see His heart; Jesus desired to touch me on this retreat.

That experience was beautiful and healing, yet I left the weekend frustrated. The retreat had unearthed additional areas of turmoil and left me feeling unsettled. In the following weeks, I continued to pray.

One struggle involved conflicting impressions of Jesus from separate seasons of my life. I had labeled them “Old Jesus” and “New Jesus” but their dual existence left me confused and afraid to fully trust. “New Jesus” routinely spoke to me through scripture and walked with me in suffering. “Old Jesus” didn’t care much about either, yet both seemed real. As I prayerfully reflected on “Old Jesus” a phrase from scripture came to me, “The devil disguised as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). In my heart, I knew the Lord was addressing my inner conflict. The Lord showed me that the devil can be so cunning as to make us believe he is “Jesus” in our lives, twisting the truth and binding us with lies that block our ability to receive God’s love.

After recognizing that my “Old Jesus” image was false, my heart still needed healing from the years of feeling all-but-abandoned in a period of deep suffering, so I challenged the Lord. “If you didn’t actually abandon me during those painful times, I should be able to find you in the darkest moments of my life.” As I proceeded to examine my past for “fruits” of God’s presence (which I learned from the retreat), I found that Jesus had been present in my past suffering but not in the way I expected. He never accused me of getting things wrong (Old Jesus image) or chided me for clinging to what was familiar. In one particularly important instance, he simply planted a beautiful desire in my heart which led me to leave a damaging situation behind.

Now, months later, my friendship with Jesus continues to grow. Instead of shutting him out of my heart when I experience fear, I give Jesus the benefit of the doubt. In this new reality, I live in more freedom, growing in the knowledge that he is trustworthy and intimately interested in my life. In fact, God recently answered a long-standing desire of my heart for mission work. On August 27th, I depart for a year on Turtle Mountain Reservation, North Dakota, to serve the Chippewa and Metis tribes through a small mission church which provides spiritual and material assistance. Without my retreat journey, I doubt I would have had the courage to respond to this call. If you’re reading this and know you struggle to trust God, I encourage you to attend the Healing the Whole Person retreat with an open heart.

As I pray for each of you this coming year, please pray that I and my fellow missionaries will be a source of hope, healing, and material resources to those in need.

Blessings, Michelle Kuhar (7 year OLGC parishioner and 5 year choir member)