

Additional thoughts from Sue Ellen Page

On Mondays at 2:00 pm, it is my delight to lead a Bible study at a nearby assisted living facility. Over half the group is brought downstairs from the skilled nursing area. These are people whose bodies are failing them in ways too significant to be in the intermediary care that assisted living provides, but whose minds and hearts are full of love and whose long lives witness to God's claim on each of them. At the beginning of the hour, we recite the scripture passages below, a spiritual practice the members of the Bible study can do as a personal meditation during the week when concerns or anxieties arise, as well as in times of gratitude.ⁱⁱⁱ (Note the subtle shift in focus depending upon the stressed word as well as the vertical relationship between heaven and earth created by the juxtaposition of these two passages.)

Speak the phrase four times, stressing a different word on each repetition. (Psalm 33:7)

I am your God.

I **AM** your God.

I am **YOUR** God.

I am your **GOD**.

Another phrase to use in this manner is found in Psalms 31, 63, 86, 118:28, 140, and 143

YOU are my God.

You **ARE** my God.

You are **MY** God.

You are my **GOD**.

At the end of the hour, we sing at least one song. A favorite is by Samuel Wesley whose familiar hymn, *Lead Me, Lord*, incorporates Psalm 5:8 plus the final sentence of this lectionary psalm (for the third Sunday after Easter):^{iv}

Psalm 4:7-8^v

...But you have filled my heart with more joy than when their wheat and wine are everywhere! I will lie down and fall asleep in peace because you alone, Lord, let me live in safety.

Then comes the best part of the weekly gathering: we bless one another. Each member of the group turns to the person seated on their right as best they can with what is often very limited mobility. I start the blessing, and we pass it around the circle in turn, making eye contact as we speak. It is hard to describe the palpable warmth and support experienced during this ritual. I watch with delight. And when it is my turn to be blessed, I too, bask in the embrace of the eyes of the one speaking these tender words: "Sue Ellen, do not be afraid. God is with you. God is for you."

Our life is hidden in that space between what we can understand and what we can't understand. -Anne Porter^{vi}

Susanna
By Anne Porter

Nobody in the hospital
Could tell the age
Of the old woman who
Was called Susanna

I knew she spoke some English
And that she was an immigrant
Out of a little country
Trampled by armies

Because she had no visitors
I would stop by to see her
But she was always sleeping

All I could do
Was to get out her comb
And carefully untangle
The tangles in her hair

One day I was beside her
When she woke up
Opening small dark eyes
Of a surprising clearness

She looked at me and said
you want to know the truth?
I answered Yes

She said it's something that
My mother told me

There's not a single inch
Of our whole body
That the Lord does not love

She then went back to sleep.^{vii}

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- i NRSV © 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA.
- ii From Revised Common Lectionary Prayers.
- iii I am indebted to author John Indermark for the inspiration of this practice, as well as the blessing text, found in the book “Do Not Live Afraid: Faith in a Fearful World” © 2009 by John Indermark. Published by Upper Room Books
- iv Lead Me, Lord is available in numerous hymn resources old and new, and is in the public domain.
- v From Common English Bible.
- vi Quote from a 3 minute video of the poet who died Oct. 10, 2011 at the age of 99. The video was filmed when she was 94.
- vii Anne Porter, “Living Things: Collected Poems” Zoland Books, An Imprint of Steerforth Press. Hanover, NH © 2006 by Anne Porter. Reprinted with permission. You can hear Garrison Keillor read poems by Anne Porter at this link to “The Writer's Almanac” http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/author.php?auth_id=2223