

Precious Pilgrim,

"All the world is a stage." Well, if it is, I hope MacBeth isn't playing every night. I don't think I could take it. My husband and I attended last night a production of this play. I know it was well done. I've seen it before and this was the best rendition I've thus far experienced. But goodness gracious, it's hard to come down from the mountaintop of a church camp retreat, which I attended this week with three friends to seeing that tragedy. Awful, awful.

"Double, double toil and trouble" witches, the killing of MacBeth's children, Lady MacBeth's insane soliloquy, the power hungry sickness, the sword fights.

Before the play we went to the patron's dinner and the director spoke. It was interesting to hear how he envisioned this production. He said it portrayed the dark side of man. Maybe the exposure to "lightness" over the past four days at camp made my senses more sensitive to the darkness.

The dark and the light of everyday. How do we deal with it? How do we cope? If I found MacBeth - a play - disturbing, what about real life situations? Thank the dear Lord, I didn't read the newspaper this morning in this sensitive state. If I had I might be up for days.

Light and dark. Good and evil. The dichotomy of life - not only societal, but individual. This idea has stayed with me since the Bishop's presentation at camp and I want to think more about it. He said everyone has the dark and the light within them, "the shadow side." This idea we need to embrace the whole of us, not just

the good parts. Jesus said in Matthew 22:37-40, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is likened to it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." I take that to mean that we can't love others, we can't love others unless we love ourselves. And only by God's grace, we have to embrace the all of ourselves. We can't "fix" ourselves, only our Lord Jesus Christ can, by His grace, by His love, and by His Holy Spirit.

That's gospel talk. Part of the process of healing includes embracing the whole of ourselves, I believe. Of course, we're not to celebrate the dark or broken, but rather to embrace it compassionately. Jesus loves us just as we are! We are His beloved children. It is only that by living in His love and accepting our brokenness, our belovedness that we can become who He meant us to be.

Often over the years, I have found myself "making a list and checking it twice, gonna find out who's naughty and nice" and that the "naughty and nice" was usually me. I am a combo. St. Paul said in Romans, chapter 7, verses 19 through 25, "For the good that I wish I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin, which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my

members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then, on the one hand, I myself with my mind am serving the law of God; but on the other hand, with my flesh, the law of sin."

When I've made my lists of plans of how I was going to "fix Lucy," make Lucy perfect for God -- surprise, surprise - I have always failed and failed miserably. It's been about control. "Lord, I love You so. I'm going to make myself perfect. I'll get back to You later when I'm fixed." Lord, forgive. Can you believe such a mindset?

Control - trying to control and fix myself. Lord, forgive. Often I've been going about this thing called "holiness" all wrong. Yes, we are to be God's holy, set-apart people, but it is only out of brokenness, surrender, and letting go, that this can occur, I think.

In his talk at the recent retreat, the Bishop suggested gentle persistence towards ourselves and our changing. I like those two words living with each other, "gentle persistence." It brings to mind the image of the Prodigal Son - the metanoia, which is the turning around and the coming back to the Father in brokenhearted humility. "Lord, forgive." He did. He does. It is about love. It is about love. It is always about love - not law.

The Bishop also talked about Jesus' parable of the tares and the wheat. He said the tares, our sins, can become, once repentantly surrendered, the very thing that enriches our wheat, our fruit, our good works, and makes our lives more bountiful, to the glory of God.

Sitting on the table next to me right now is a little enameled box that was given to me one Christmas by my father-in-law's wife. I

liked it primarily because it was a gift and it has a lovely floral design. I've paid little attention to the prayer within the garland, thinking it really didn't pertain to me and my life. It's the AA's Serenity Prayer and pridefully, I've thought, I'm not an alcoholic, therefore it's not relevant. Lord, forgive my ignorance and my arrogance.

"God grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can, and Wisdom to know the difference."

Is that not a Prodigal Son-ish prayer? In many ways, I am totally, one hundred percent female, but I am also very Prodigal Son-ish. Are you also Prodigal Son-ish? And I want to become more and more Prodigal Son-ish each day.

I want to turn to him, do you? I mean the turning around, the repenting, the asking for forgiveness, the allowing of our Father God, our Abba, Daddy to embrace daily, to love daily - now, not when I get my controlling Pharisaic, self-designed act together. Ow, that hurts! I am a sinner. Are you? I was a sinner. Were you? I will be a sinner. Will you? Oh, by God's grace and our daily keeping our eyes focused on Him, there hopefully might be some growth, some improvement, the metanoia, the changing, the rearranging I think is His, our Lord God's business. Ours is the surrendering. I do so yearn to be totally His, our Lord, our Savior Jesus Christ's. Do you so yearn? I am His beloved. You, precious pilgrim, also are His beloved. It is out of my belovedness that I want to act, to work, to play, to celebrate. Is that also your heart's desire?

Psalm 21 says, "He will give us our heart's desire." Sounds like a promise to me.

Now it's time to quit this letter. It's 8 o'clock and it's time for this day to unfold. My husband just came into the room. We planned our day. He has to go to work and he said why didn't I write "today's" letter while he was gone and be done with it. Tight shouldered, I said that wasn't how it worked, that these writings come out of the day. He said, "Couldn't I just make up something?" I said, "No," again. That wasn't how it worked. He works in the mode of "You have a project, you sit down and do it" - that is his goal-oriented understanding. Writing doesn't work that way for me. Gentle persistence and a humble pen with a Prodigal Sonish-held head works better for me.

*I must. I should. Lord Jesus Christ, I cannot - without you.
Peace, pilgrim.*

*I am your Prodigal-Sonish,
ever-turning sister in Christ,
Lucy*