

I'm so happy that we can reflect together on how can we be good news for a fractured world? And we'll hear from friends like Hildegard of Bingen, Julianne of Norwich, also Father Richard Rohr, John Batiste, and many others.

For me, the good news often begins outside with trees and a three by five card on which I've written or typed a scripture verse or an old hymn or a poem or some Thurman meditation. And then I practice Lectio Divina with it, reading, responding, reflecting and sitting with it in various ways, reading it over and again and then resting. And often, then, a song emerges simply by this meaningful repetition.

And here is one of them that emerged with Psalm 46:10. Be still and know that I am God. Be still and know that I am God.

But when I was 22 and a student at Heidelberg University on a Rotary scholarship, I'd stopped singing. I was suffering then from undiagnosed anorexia, dyslexia, PTSD and depression. My father was violent and I am a trauma survivor. And that's when I met Sophie Bushbeck. She was a trauma survivor, too. She was 79 and a widow. And we were introduced by my college professor. He and his wife had sent her and her eight children food and clothes when they were World War II refugees. And her husband, Fritz, a Lutheran minister and chaplain was five years in a Russian prison.

Muti Bushbeck brought me back to life by singing, simply singing blessings before meals. She taught them to her grandchildren when they visited and to me. And one of them was all good gifts. All we have comes, oh God, from you. We thank you for it. And I still sing this often, and it goes like this.

[foreign language 00:02:53].

One day, as Sophie, so well named, Bushbeck and I were walking [foreign language 00:03:06], philosopher's way, across from the castle. Her arm was looped through mine and she said, "I want to tell you why I teach my grandchildren those songs before blessings as blessings." She said, "It's in case one day they're in the bottom of a bombed out building." And she wasn't being dramatic and her words have stayed with me for decades. What songs do you sing regularly that bring your head into your heart and both into your body that dissolve your fear in love's embrace? What songs do you have in your soul's jukebox that know you by heart as well as you know in them by heart?

So my kind mother brought us up singing and she's a woman of faith. She, at home, would play gospel hymns on our upright piano and my three siblings and I sang with her like, What a Friend we have in Jesus, or Chitty-Chitty Bang-Bang. I've also steeped, as you saw earlier, in Bible verses so repeatedly they just become tunes. Sometimes I sing homegrown lamentations and homegrown songs of joy. Often, when I get to translate an ancestor, like anonymous who wrote Cloud of Unknowing, a song will emerge from steeping in his text and all of a sudden I'm singing the Cloud of Unknowing.

As a trauma survivor, singing has helped me taste my voice, develop my intimacy with my holy breath. I've sung my way through trauma, fear, questioning, gratitude, discerning, and joy. So let's hear from Hildegard, the 12th century Benedictine Abbess. She encourages us also to sing. Here's what she says. "God's grace rewards not only those who never slip, but also those who bend and fall. So, sing. The song of rejoicing softens hard hearts. Singing summons the Holy Spirit. It's our best hope to hear divine harmony again. Don't stop singing," she says.

And John Batiste emphasized in a CAC online gathering how crucial it is for humans to participate in imperfect healthy singing. And so did civil rights and women's rights activist, Fannie Lou Hamer. She said of music's power, "Singing brings out the soul."

And in Deep River, philosopher and mystic, Dr. Howard Thurman, speaks of the legacy of the Black church as, "The genius of the spirituals that were born out of a sense of being a child of God and how they remind us of that." These spirituals helped Thurman celebrate life in hard times. They restored his soul and they helped him do what was his to do. And he reminds us, during these turbulent times, birds still sing, and so can we. Singing restores the spirit and helps us be human.

If, like me, you grew up with a punitive Bible, Father Richard Rohr thankfully reminds us the Bible isn't meant to be used to dominate anyone nor win an argument. Instead, he says the Bible is for the sake of divine transformation called theosis. I also call this theosis being human. To experience theosis, Jesus says, "Become as little children, develop a beginner's mind." Or as I think of it, always be willing to begin singing again.

Lectio Divina often becoming singing helps alchemize scripture's love and repair me and the world. It heals since the fractured world isn't just on the news. It's also in me. So I sing to remind me I'm not alone in this. And it nourishes me to do what's mine to do. And as Jim Finley reminds us, it deepens our listening. Jim said to me once in the monastery, Merton said, quoting Augustine, "When we chant, we're deepening our capacity to listen. Steeping in scripture and singing have also helped me meet the God Jesus walked with. Walter Bruggeman says this God is merciful, gracious, faithful, forgiving and steadfast in love. And Julianne of Norwich says the same. She says, "God is wrathless toward us."

God's not mad at us. Some of us go on long, painful journeys. Learning God is not like an angry parent we may have had. God is kind and adores us. Then we have the 12th century Carthusian Monk, Guigo II, who says this about sacred reading, Lectio Divina. He says, "Reading is to seek God's sweet, loving presence, reflecting on and chewing a text's goodness, then responding and praying." God, here's how my life is. Could you please help me? I want to be friends. And then contemplating tastes presence. "And singing," Guigo says, "is text steeping's consummation." And the best news is anyone can do it. We're made for holy text steeping that often becomes simple chanting. Or you can sing hymns or other favorite songs, or experiment with poems asking what works for you?

This is exactly what the Cloud of Unknowing's Anonymous says. He says, "Try things out, experiment." And it's what Monks do and nuns. Some six to eight hours a day they steep in scripture and chant. And you know this is exactly the same number of hours daily that cows chew their cud and digest all the enzymes and all the nutrients and nourish themselves that way. It takes time.

Merton says of this nourishment, "The Psalms are our bread of heaven in the wilderness of our Exodus." And he says, "The spirit of Christ sings them in our hearts." And you can sense this when you sing often. It's like Jesus is singing in you. Merton adds, "The Psalms are the language of God's kingdom. They can explain ourselves to us."

Father Richard also reminds us scripture is a feast for now. Scripture's not about the life of Jesus then," he says, "but about life with Jesus now." If, in reading the gospels, we don't hear Jesus speaking to our contemporary situation, we're missing their meaning. May we sing ourselves into greater self-compassion, "Come more alive," as Thurman says, and better love and help others.

And we'll end by singing a tune that emerged in the marsh over time. You're invited to sing with me, meditating on Christ's intimate, timeless invitation in Matthew 11:28. It's a very simple chant.

Come on to me. Come onto me. Come on to me. All you who are weary and burdened. All you who are weary and burdened. All you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. And I will give you rest. And I will give you rest.

May you be blessed as you experiment with steeping in sacred texts and in simple empowering chanting.