

Dearly Beloved,

Wedding liturgy begins with these words. The first two words remind everyone who has come, not just those two who are getting married, that we are loved dearly. And, since the words are most often spoken in church, we are meant to fill in the blank, dearly beloved of God.

It is easy to forget how loved we are in our search to grow spiritually. A friend reminded me that we often get trapped in working to become someone, something. We work the steps if we are part of a 12 step program, we work to keep our spiritual disciplines, and we work to forgive. I confess that I am working through 3 different studies which require me to answer introspective questions and I'm, at the moment, a bit tired of directed self examination. Remember as a tree cannot grow without sunlight, neither can we grow until we are soaking in God's love.

Really, what I most need right now I can get when I'm still, when I quiet myself and reach out for God. Or when I'm praying with one of you and we reach out to God together. Or when we are talking and listening to one another, making conscious what is holy and good and real. It is a little of what I imagine it to be like with Jesus. I suspect the disciples didn't hang out with Jesus so they could grow spiritually. The best spiritual exercise he gave them was in his physically leaving this world; that's when the disciples had to hop to it. The disciples hung out with Jesus because they felt his love.

Today, remember, it feels good to hang out with Jesus. While he can be hot tempered especially when faced with Pharisees, he more often speaks tenderly, calling out what is good about your soul. Do what you need to do to keep sober, but I invite you to put aside spiritual *work* this week, and simply live as if you believed it is you who is dearly beloved.

In Christ,

Heather