

**Novena of Grace**  
**Sunday 3.4.18**  
**Sarah Weller**

On this second day of the Novena, we once again bring our deep desires to God, and to one another, trusting that through the intercession of St Francis Xavier and this St Ignatius community, those desires may be brought to fullness through us. Yesterday, we heard about the power of forgiveness in the parable of the Prodigal Son, and the importance of this forgiveness and healing on our journey toward embracing peace in ourselves and in our world. That forgiveness allows us to make room for seeds of peace that then may sprout and bloom.

Today, I'd like to invite us to explore our places of inner peace, and how we might be called by God to help these seeds of peace grow, in our own hearts and in hearts around us.

I am an anxious person. Coming to terms with this, saying it out loud to people, letting go of the expectations of what I'm supposed to be doing or how my life is supposed to look, and embracing the peace found in trying to be my most authentic self, has been my primary spiritual work over the last 10 years. My anxiety used to be something that caused me shame. It was something I would try to hide from people around me, and naively, try to hide from God as well. I would act like I knew what I was doing, that I had all the pieces in place, that all my ducks were in a row. That I had answers and clarity and was in control and understood God's plan for me and how to live it out in the world. It was a pretty good act. I had practiced it quite a bit and I pretended that it protected me from being seen as foolish or from feeling vulnerable to what others thought or said.

This facade, this "looking good on the outside", this "pretending to have it all together" did not do much for my inner peace. It did not do much for my relationship with God or my ability to hear God's voice and respond. My little anxiety gremlins kept me moving in circles, kept me distracted and disconnected from the places God was working in my life. It wasn't until my anxiety got so overwhelming that I needed to seek treatment for it, that I needed to admit out loud to other people that I needed help and that I wasn't in control, that I was able to own this part of me too - to honor it as part of my whole self, and - to trust that God lives deep down in it as well. That God uses it and guides me through it.

I still struggle with my anxiety in a culture that asks me to be distracted all the time. That distracted me as I sat down to write this reflection. That prevents me from letting go of

the shoulds and have tos in order to fully embrace who I am right now exactly as God has made me. And so reconnecting with my deep down places where God resides and where I can respond to the world from a place of peace - takes prayer and God's grace and a willingness to sit and be present with myself and to embrace all of the places where I don't feel God and I don't know what I'm doing and I'm not sure if I trust. It takes a deep desire to hold space for inner peace.

The beauty of God is that God keeps finding ways to invite us deeper into the truth of who we are. To embrace all the parts of ourselves, without judgement, and to honor them all as part of who we were created to be. We don't need to have our ducks in a row for God to love us. We don't need to hide any part of ourselves from the God who loves us so deeply.

This authentic part of us is where we plant our own seeds of peace. The peace of authenticity. Of knowing our deep down truths - the truths God created us to be - and of standing firmly in that place and from there living as honestly and truthfully to God's call as we can. This is how we can embrace peace and how ultimately we can allow God in to heal us in our broken places.

Today we hear in the Gospel about Jesus meeting a Samaritan woman. About the conversation that followed. Of Jesus meeting her in her everyday life. As she was running an errand. Of Jesus asking for her help. Of Jesus connecting with her deeply, without judgement and with an open heart. What an amazing gift that must've been for her, to be seen so fully, so whole-ly, by a stranger. And to be asked for something she had the capacity to give in order to help someone else. I have to imagine this woman felt the deep peace of being seen and accepted as her whole self. Of being called by God into discipleship exactly the way she was in that moment. Of the deep wellspring of God's love that does not run dry.

I'd like to try something together, if you'll humor me for a moment. Let's take a deep breath. Let's close our eyes, settle into our seats, and invite God to settle in a little deeper into our hearts. Into our guts. Into our deep down places, where maybe we aren't sure we're ready to have God hang out. And let's take another deep breath, letting the breath of God that is all around us seep into each and every nook and cranny. And one more. In and out. Ok.

I'd like you to imagine you are walking to the store, maybe to pick up something you forgot. Or you're running your weekly errands. Maybe you are on your way to work or to school or to the park. When you arrive at your destination, someone is sitting there

waiting for you. You've never met them, but you feel as if you know them. They have kind eyes and a warm smile. They ask for your help. Not just any help, but something you have all the skills and talents to do. Something that comes easy for you. As though they know you deep down and know exactly what you can offer. How easy is it to say yes to this request? How good does it feel to be able to offer this help? How grace-filled?

And so it is with God. God asks each of us to embrace and create and nurture peace in ourselves, in our days and in our world just as easily as Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for water, and she had the means to offer it. And Jesus took that small moment, that small request, and used it to create change and build community and cross cultures and sow seeds of peace. And so it is with us. Jesus invites us each day, in small moments, in seemingly ordinary moments, to say yes to one another and to sow seeds of peace.

I am running low on thoughtful words, so I'll let the poet Rilke convey a final thought:

*I am, you anxious one.*

*Don't you sense me, ready to break  
into being at your touch?  
My murmurings surround you like shadowy wings.  
Can't you see me standing before you  
cloaked in stillness?  
Hasn't my longing ripened in you  
from the beginning  
as fruit ripens on a branch?*

*I am the dream you are dreaming.  
When you want to awaken, I am that wanting:  
I grow strong in the beauty you behold.  
And with the silence of stars I enfold  
your cities made by time.*

Over these Novena days, may we together find those places of peace within ourselves and with in one another where we can hold each other's needs, each other's prayers and the prayers of our communities. May we continue to welcome God's unfolding.