

Let me remind us of the age-old story of the sun and the wind, having a debate over who could make a man remove his coat. (*The Wind starts first and whips up stronger and stronger winds; the man just grabs his coat and grips tighter and tighter. The Sun then takes its turn, bathes the man in warming light until, of course, the man voluntarily takes off his coat.*) No analogy is perfect, but it gives us the idea that we are best to coax people, to influence people to do things, not expect or demand they will do things you want! In fact, one is likely to resist things that are commanded with force. It's like knowing that you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. With regards to God's love, Jesus' love, theologians often speak of "Divine Courtesy"... The Spirit of God does not force itself on people, but allows allows freedom of people to receive and follow... or not.

I think this analogy is relevant to our current political entrenchments, the digging in of heels or doubling down on points of view set in stone. A poet that Krista Tippet interviewed said it well...that we cannot expect the National Organization of Women and the National Organization of Catholic Bishops to find common ground on the issues like abortion. Neither party can change the other to any extent; they are on two extremes. And trying to "hammer home" any viewpoint as right, or the only way, can just make the other party dig in heels even more. The poet suggests that better than the hammer approach ... is to express some vulnerability or limitation regarding one's wisdom on an issue. To admit that we do not have the definitive answer to a problem is to allow for true dialogue, to allow for learning and being influenced by another point of view, and perhaps even to negotiate a compromise, find some middle way.

To be honest about one's wounds or limits is the way of healing, which then is also the way of empowerment. We know that individuals

that have issues of childhood abandonment or abuse do carry those disabling wounds around most of a lifetime.

They can surface in many strange ways... such as always playing the victim, or having temper tantrums well into adulthood. But being honest about wounds and vulnerable places in a safe and loving environment (like good counseling) can allow healing and new strength for living life more fully.

Paul makes this point about his own life. He had many persecutions, imprisonments, and some sort of “thorn” that bothered him. No one knows if he meant outer persecution, inner torment and temptation, or actual physical pain. But the lesson he learned was that he found new power and the grace of God by admitting a weakness. Confessing a vulnerability, his “thorn,” allowed for the Grace of God to enter with some degree of healing, not taking away the thorn, but healing in the form of new power... The story of Job is another example of one with great suffering, we could say “weakness,” that Job could not control and could not figure out. Somehow, in the admission of his limits, Job then received new healing and strength.

I suggest Ken Medema as a modern day example of someone with a weakness (his blindness) who has found a different kind of strength through that very limitation. We know that he has used his creative mind and sensitive ears to become a master of music. In our gospel lesson about the blind man, I want to underscore again the meaning of the words “Your faith has made you well.” Yes, in this *particular* case, Jesus says that his faith did indeed help the man. Faith can indeed have plenty of power, in this case a power that somehow went to the man’s eyes. But it is not logical to say that anyone whose eyes are not healed of blindness has poor faith. An analogy is that good habits of diet and exercise often causes longer life. But if someone dies at a younger age, it does not mean that they necessarily had poor habits of diet and

exercise. There are so many factors way beyond our understanding. In the case of Ken Medema, his faith in God did bring about healing. As with Paul, the thorn of his blindness was not taken away, but he found healing in a different way. He found a great purpose for his life, to become a singer and songwriter for God. I don't think I've played this song for you before; in it, Ken tells his experience of a new way of seeing and hearing the Spirit of God.... Seeing with his heart, and hearing the music of angels. He wrote this song in his early 30's and as you know he continued writing songs infused with the Spirit for the rest of his life, is still touring the country, and will stop here again in April.

You might think I played only music by Ken Medema (I only have two songs by Ken this afternoon!) But really, Ken has written good songs, some of the best songs, to fit just about any theme, in the Bible, or otherwise.

As you know, for me, music is a huge part of my spiritual journey and prayer life. While nowhere near the level of my friend Ken, I think that God also likes to use me as a song! Here's the song, one that I love, that inspires me... so tender, so honest so full of passion and purpose!

I SAW YOU, by Ken Medema, c.1980

*I saw you in the darkness. I saw you, you were looking for me. When you turned the light on, my poor blind eyes begin to see.
I heard you in the silence. I heard you, you were singing a song. When I heard the music I had to try to sing along. Oh, so many times I've seen you before, so many times, I've heard your voice. It seems like this time there was some thing much more; this was the time I made the choice to follow you. I know you in the light now. I know you, and I'm beginning to see that you are opening my eyes and you are making a song out of me.*