

In the Christian Scriptures (Mark 9:14-29), there is an exchange between Jesus of Nazareth and the disciples who follow in his transforming wake. The disciples have encountered a father with a troubled son. Because their teacher is away, the students attempt to do what they have been taught. They strive to bring wholeness to the brokenness that writhes in agony before them. They fail. They do not understand why they cannot effect change when they have changed similar circumstances in the past (Mk 6:7, 30). This time, though the brokenness is of the same kind, its degree is much more severe.

When the teacher arrives upon the scene, with the man imploring that he intercede, the distraught disciples wonder openly why the methods they have deployed successfully before fail so dismally now. The answer: prayer. With all their efforts, they did not include prayer.

For the writer of Mark's Gospel, prayer is connected with the power of belief. Prayer is asking God for anything with the believing world view that God has the power to deliver. It is also the belief that God has the power to transform hopeless situations into hopeful ones.

I suspect that the sentiment behind the National Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS is connected to the same believing world view that, even when a person or a community is trapped by an apparently intractable brokenness, God has the power to deliver.

Deliverance, of course, is orchestrated through many forms, some of them clearly human: the research of scientists and medical professionals; the education of teachers; the fund raising of volunteers; the sharing of time and presence of caring friends and strangers; the petitioning of religious, political, and social activists. Just as important, particularly for people of spiritual faith, there is the energizing and community-forming force that is unleashed in prayer.

AIDS has proven itself to be one of the most tenacious forms of brokenness in our time. To call communities to pray together seems, in my own faith view, an appropriate way both to call upon God and to focus our own energies to the transforming task that confronts us. Prayer focuses us on the trust that the universe we inhabit is shaped by benevolent intent. Prayer convicts us to become conduits of and participants in that intent by how we speak up for those who are afflicted, work to change the conditions that either allow or exacerbate the progress of the affliction, give to the many foundations and sciences focused on prevention and cure, and assist with generosity and love those who have been touched in some way by this disease.

The National Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS is such an effort of focus and conviction. I am pleased to be a part of it and to have the opportunity to ask our seminary community to participate with me.

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