



I have this group of friends who have been able to pull off some rather impressive vacations over the last several years, including just a few weeks ago, beginning with Yellowstone...Grand Teton...even Canada's picturesque treasure in Banff...and then there was Glacier National Park, perhaps one of our country's most spectacular sights, leading one of my friends to conclude, that no matter the most updated phone technology at our fingertips, the pictures still do not do near the justice to its majesty. It is believed that over 3 million people visit this surreal combination of ancient glaciers and alpine meadows and carved valleys and beautiful

lakes, not to mention 700 miles' worth of trails throughout the park. Some of those millions are people like my tourist friends. Some are those trying to get to all the national parks in their lifetime. But some have reached a point in their life where they seem to have found absolute rock bottom, dealing with grief or addiction or an illness that seems to have become their ultimate identity. And some of those stories are just as majestic as any of the images you will find of nature's bounty. So, I want to share with you one such story, written 20 years ago, by a woman named Mary. She wrote:

*I had just finished 6 months of chemo for Stage 3B cancer. It had been a long winter in Minnesota, and during my chemo treatments, I'd been inside for most of the winter, watching movies, reading, writing a little, and doing a lot of self-reflection. When spring came, I knew I needed to get back outdoors in nature. I needed to get moving.*

*My husband and I decided to head west to Glacier – a park we'd wanted to visit for years. I was thrilled. Our first hike was through the Trail of the Cedars and on up to Avalanche Lake. We'd been hikers all our lives, but I now was dealing with the lingering side effects of chemo: neuropathy in my feet and legs that caused burning feelings, and sensations running up and down my calves that were similar to when you hit your crazy bone. Along with the neuropathy, was the extreme fatigue that came with an experimental drug I was still on for another 6 months. I really wanted to do this hike, but didn't know if I could.*

*When we arrived at Trail of the Cedars, we took the path that is "less travelled." It was hushed and silent within the forest of huge ancient trees, and truly felt like a sanctuary. I felt enfolded and comforted by my surroundings. The old cedars seemed to say, "Be patient with yourself. Take it slow and easy." The climb along Avalanche Creek that winds through the Trail of the Cedars and then on up to the alpine lake at the creek's source was pretty difficult for me. I wasn't used to the altitude and over the long winter had lost any aerobic capacity I once had. I was breathing hard, and my legs and feet were in pain. But I kept going a little at a time. People nonchalantly passed me practically skipping up the trail in flip flops! But I decided to take the advice I'd "heard" in the cedar grove... just keep going, take it slow and easy.*

*When I got to the top, the view of the alpine lake unfolded before us and totally wowed me. I couldn't speak. Such amazing beauty and majesty! We hiked around the lake and stayed for several hours. Again, the feeling I had was that I'd happened upon a sacred place. I felt blessed. The beauty and power were so overwhelming, and I felt myself to be an integral part of it. And I knew I was going to be okay. I felt healed. I didn't know if I was cured of my cancer, but my spirit - my heart and mind - were healed. I was no longer afraid of my future. And here I am ten years later, still in remission.*

*I will always be extremely grateful for that week in Glacier. Both my husband and I think it's our favorite national park...the peace and solitude and awesome beauty transformed me – gave me back my life and gave me hope.*

I couldn't help but think of such a heart-enriching story and awe-inspiring images with the reading from Isaiah: during a time in the history of the Israelites, when they were torn away from their

homes, ripped away from family and friends, separated from life normalcy, from some sense of wholeness over body, heart and mind. And when the prophet foretells of their desperately-awaited return home, the Creation that they may just have had an even deeper and more intimate relationship with than we do thousands of years later; the Creation cannot help but join in the most joyous song, to further unleash the wholeness of body, heart, and mind, that many of them must have wondered, if it had been lost forever.

And so during these weekends when we offer healing services here at Divinity, we do our part to offer such time and space to invite people forward for a prayer or an anointing of oil: for times in people's lives when they may very well feel separated from the time in their life when earthly matters seemed to be better; when there was some sense of wholeness for the all-around body, heart, and mind. And then something happens to alter that normalcy, separating us from better days and more well-off chapters in our mortal story. So, we long for the healing and the hope to perhaps bring some of that back.

We offer such a possibility today, but the church is also obligated to remind as many children of God as we can of the healing that might just be possible outside our church and home and hospital and rehab and nursing home doors. All of which do their needed part, to be sure, but the Creation in all is beauty, in all its tranquility, in all its most precious parts that take our breath away, the Creation cannot be taken for granted as a most vital extension of God's relentless love and grace for you and the whole world. That the words proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah to the Israelites long ago, might just be meant for you too: that "you shall go out in joy and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song." So, for all the sources of new life in our midst, including from Jesus Christ himself, thanks be to God, indeed! Amen!

*Letter from the "My Park Story" series from the National Parks Conservation Association:*

<https://www.npca.org/myparkstory/story/9b0d4d4d-2965-4b9f-b96b-8fc40ee8ff7a>