

CHAPTER
14 *Beth's Psalm*

Psalm 27

*as understood by a Christian woman, age twenty-one,
who was raped at sixteen
and who has struggled to heal¹*

the Lord is my light and my deliverance

“The Lord is my light” – the burning ball of fire that lifts me; the vision and the joy, the shimmering that I see in the distance; and I smile because I know it is there for me.

“The Lord is also my deliverance” – “Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name . . . deliver us from evil.” Take me away, surround me with light and love; protect me as I do your will.

“The Lord is my light and my deliverance” – This is the old text. When they broke in, stripped me of my clothes and my power, and said, “Do you want to fuck, white bitch,” the text burned right before my eyes.

of whom am I afraid

that's easy.

I am afraid of the men with guns,
of the men who hate and destroy

¹ This interpretation of Psalm 27 contains language that may seem offensive. It is my strong feeling that those of us in the helping professions, particularly those of us who represent religious life, owe it to the victims of violence to allow survivors to speak in their own sometimes very anguished terms; we must listen and hear, even when their anger is offensive; and we must affirm the language of their pain. Accordingly, I have left this text largely untouched. [Ed. note]

because they have nothing better to do on a Saturday night.

What a stupid question to ask.

the Lord is the fortress of my life

The strong structure, the shell. I fill in the inside and I am safe there. But the walls fall down around me and I scream in horror, "Wait! Where are you going? Why did you fall?"

God, the world looks different now. I am just standing here, there is nothing to lean on, there is nothing around me. . . . Why did you leave me, God? Why did you let them do it? I was not doing anything wrong, I was being good. I was just a little girl.

whom do I fear

anyone, I have no walls, no protection, no structure. I am just standing amidst rubble. What do you mean, "Whom do I fear?" Everyone.

when evildoers draw near to me in war, to gorge my flesh . . . my heart will not be afraid

"My heart will not be afraid" — this does not make any sense. Evildoers are going to *gorge my flesh*; they are going to rip, tear, eat, puncture, burn my tender flesh with knives, guns, with violent words — and my heart is *not* going to be afraid? If it beats, it fears. Even shock does not totally numb.

Evildoers *did* gorge my flesh. And my heart, my soul, my mind, my body, my spirit all were afraid. All trembled, shook, and looked straight into the eyes of two men who promised to "fuckin' kill me" if I didn't do what they said.

Only people who have never seen, who don't know, can listen to the text as it is because, if you *know*, you know it is not true.

I have asked but one thing of the Lord . . . that He conceal me in his sukka on the day of evil

"I have asked but one thing of the Lord" — that he keep his promises! If you say you are my protector, then protect me. If you cannot protect me, at least tell me so. Don't pretend you can conceal me, protect me, or shield me. Don't pretend to be a rock or a shepherd. Don't pretend to have a sukka.

"I have asked but one thing of the Lord" — please heal me, and please don't let that ever happen to anyone else again. On the day of evil, I was not concealed in a sukka, whatever that is. . . . I was an open target. I was a lamb, and the shepherd was asleep.

Hey Lord, remember the Psalm, I think it is 23, "The Lord is Your Shepherd, You Shall Not Want?"

I a
I H

I s
He
I c
Be

Th
wh
Th
all
Wl

But
you

hing
Why
ood.

midst

will

oers
urn
; not
mb.
ody,
the
said.
text

ikka

you
least
don't

lon't
aled
the

ierd,

Well your lamb was mutilated.

And I did / do want.

I screamed

If you are real, God,

come now

and get these monsters off of me.

I did want, I prayed

I want you here

I want to live

I want to die and I want you to hold

me in your loving presence

I want you to deliver me from

this horror and violence.

I want you to be the shepherd.

Wake the hell up

and see me!

I am crumbled by the side of the bed, can you see me?

I have been stripped of my clothes

my innocence, my virginity.

Weren't / aren't you watching??

I shall sing and chant to the Lord

Hear my voice, O Lord.

I call.

Be gracious unto me and answer me.

Where were you???

Where were you???

Where were you!!!

This will be my chant,

where were you when I needed you?

They said they wanted money, a television, and me;

all they got was me.

Where were you?

I sure was calling. Either you heard my voice and did not / could not answer, or you cannot even hear me. Either way, I was betrayed and left alone, unprotected.

I do seek your Face . . . hide not Your Face from me

It is *my* choice now, whether or not to seek your face.

NOW I CAN SEE YOUR FACE. IT IS BRUISED AND SCARRED.

YOU ARE NOT SMILING.

Your face is battered!

Maybe the help you can give is limited. That is not your fault.

But it is the nun's fault for teaching me wrong.

do not forsake me and do not abandon me

These are your words to *me*. Now I understand.

You know that you let me down and now you are saying: don't leave me, give me another chance, stick with me. Should I?

Can you play a part in the healing of something that you let happen? Should I even let you?

Goddamn, after all the hell I have been through on this earth that you created and after all of the broken promises and the bullshit about tents and rocks and shepherds . . . after all of that, I am supposed to yearn for / turn to you?

do not give me over to the will of my tormentors

You already did.

maybe you cried too . . .

Were it not for the Face² I would be certain that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of life . . .

I have seen your battered and bruised face.

I know what the world is like.

But will this prevent me from seeing the goodness in the land of life? That is the constant struggle.

That is, I think, what healing is about.

² Lit., "fact." [Ed. note]

Hea

An i

It ta

"put

not i

also

"ma

it, w

Fc

My

assh

I kn

chee

the c

I gre

H

it wa

its fa

I t

I wil

that

tioni

life w

Wha

inno

child

tears

I h

of th

I kne

mise.

Jesus

bloo

have

Lord

Or

save

that

give

suffer

rifici:

I d

Healing

An interesting word. Over the years I have found out that it is hard to do. It takes work. Healing is work and patience. After I was raped, I decided to "put it behind me." I did that for three years and I discovered that healing is not ignoring. You can't forget a rape. As I began therapy I learned that you also can't make sense of it, or resolve it, or forgive it, and you definitely can't "make the best of it." God, I hate that one. What you can do is heal from it, whatever that means.

For years I hurt deep inside and I thought there was no way to fix the hurt. My world had been crushed. Whenever I saw little girls, I wondered what asshole would come along and ruin them. I felt emotionally ruined. I knew. I knew what horror and hate were. The transition from basketball and cheerleading to horror and hate happened in one split second. When I turned the corner and I saw them and they said, "Oh, look what we found . . .," I grew up. And I have resented it ever since.

Healing does not mean forgetting that it happened, or ever thinking that it was / is all right. I think that healing means looking deep into it, right into its face, and then moving through it to the other side.

I think now that I am on the road to healing because I finally know that I will be ok. For years I would have told you that I was going to be ok, but that would have been my head talking and not my heart. I never stopped functioning, but I stopped believing it was worth it. The humor and the joy in life were clouded by the sadness. I could not really love because I hurt so much. What a wonderful thing those men took from me . . . the ability to love innocently, with the knowledge and belief that I was protected. The gift of childhood — everyone must lose it, but I lost it violently: through pain and tears and shock and loneliness. And I do not understand why.

I had been taught that God had a "plan" for everyone; well, if this was part of the plan, then I hated and resented God. I stopped going to church because I knew that the Bible was a lie. God had been put to the test and he had failed miserably. Also, I started to really hate the whole idea of Jesus. I really resent Jesus because I think he should have said, "Hell no! I am not going to hang bloody on that cross. What good will that do? That is the stupidest idea I have ever heard of." But instead he said, "Why me, Lord?" and then, "Ok, Lord, I will do it." He said, "Ok, I will suffer and it will be good." Yuk!

Once I called my preacher and I asked, "How exactly did Jesus' suffering save us from sin?" His answer, of course, was, "Faith tells us so." The idea that God would ask someone he loved to suffer revolted me, and no one could give me an acceptable reason for why it had to happen. Well, I don't think suffering is good. I don't see that it does any good. And I hate the idea of a sacrificial lamb. Was that what happened to me? Was I sacrificed for some reason?

I don't think that the rape of a child, the rape of me, is good — in any sense

swer,
lone,

give

ould

eated
ocks
you?

lness

That

of the word; and I resent like hell the people who imply that, in some way, it will be good. People at the church have said, "Well, at least it will make her stronger." That infuriates me. Suffering was *not* good.

Though the suffering Jesus revolts me (I cannot even take communion anymore because the idea of Jesus giving his flesh for us to eat makes me sick), I cannot throw out my religion completely either. Spirituality has always been a part of my life and I want it to be part of my life again. But I can't accept the things I used to believe in wholeheartedly. I am going to have to rework my image of God, of the world, and of God's involvement in the world.

I cannot forget or forgive what it felt like to be abandoned by my shepherd. I think I now need to heal spiritually. And I am not sure I know what that means. So I read Wiesel and I try to understand how he still loves and trusts God after the holocaust. I think, in some ways, we are on the same journey.

Beth's Healing Psalm

abandonment.

I am cold. I am alone. I am hurt.

Why??

If Jesus wants to be the sacrificial lamb

FINE

but I don't want it.

I want to be left whole

and right now I am being ripped and torn . . .

I do not understand and I am mad as hell.

anger. confusion. betrayal.

my trust is stripped and crushed.

And yet, the deep dark green of the trees

And yet, the running mountain water

And yet, the bliss of trusting again, of running through sprinklers
on a summer day, laughing and kissing and feeling complete.

A tear.

A promise.

Yes, Lord, I will still participate in
the PROCESS.

Beth
July 1990

Facing the Abusing God

A Theology of Protest

DAVID R. BLUMENTHAL

Westminster/John Knox Press
Louisville, Kentucky

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY
OF AMERICA LIBRARIES
Washington, D.C.