

Dear Friends,

Growing up in a United Church of Christ congregation, I came away with a sense that God is love (though struggled with the violence and condemnation found in the Bible and in the Church's history), that worship is important, and that we should struggle for justice for all people. What I didn't come away with were ways to pray always in all ways, to continue to grow in our faith (once confirmation was done, we were golden unless we wanted to be ordained), and that healing and health were just as important in Jesus' ministry as sin/salvation, justice, and the Kingdom of God/Heaven.

I have witnessed and heard of miracles in my ministry and in our churches of someone on the brink of death comes back to life, the cancer or disease was cured unexpectedly, or came out unscathed from some horrendous accident. I also prayed along with my family, friends, and churches for the healing of my first wife, Cyndie, who died after a 22-month battle with cancer. I have visited those who claimed they could feel the prayers of the church and those who have felt despair because the prayers weren't working.

Rev. Frederick Buechner wrote in "Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC"

Magic is Abracadabra and pulling the rabbit out of the hat, is stepping on a crack to break your mother's back, is a dashboard Jesus to prevent smash-ups. Magic is going to church so you will get to heaven. Magic is using Listerine so everybody will love you Magic is the technique of controlling unseen powers and will always work if you do it by the book. Magic is manipulation and say, My will be done. Religion is propitiation and says, Thy will be done.

Religion is praying, and maybe the prayer will be answered and maybe it won't, at least not the way you want or when you want or maybe not at all. Even if you do it by the book, religion doesn't always work, as Jesus pointed out in the one of his more somber utterances when he said, "Not everyone who says, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 7:21), the corollary to which would appear to be, "Not everyone who wouldn't be caught dead saying, 'Lord, Lord' shall be blackballed from the kingdom of Heaven." He softened the blow somewhat then by adding that the way to enter the kingdom of Heaven is to do the will of his Father in Heaven; but when religion claims that it's always sure what that will is, it's only bluffing. Magic is always sure.

If security's what you are after, try magic. If adventure is what you're after, try religion. The line between them is notoriously fuzzy. (p. 67)

This Sunday, now that we are back into being pretty well fully open, we are going to do a service of anointing in our worship. We will anoint for healing, for strength, for forgiveness, for calling. No guarantees, just inviting those who want to come forward with faith that in this prayer action, we open ourselves to the adventure and, at least, feel God's love.

Peace,

Pastor Enno