

I came across a story that I think is hilarious but grateful it didn't happen to me. It's a true story. A young man had just returned from a holiday ski trip. It was 12 below. The skiers had no feeling in their toes. They had a basic numbness all over. It was one of those, "tell me we are having fun kind of days."

One of the women in the group complained to her husband that she had to go to the bathroom. The only problem is that they were already on the ski lift, going up. He told her, "Don't worry, there has to be a restroom at the top of the lift for female skiers in distress." He was wrong; the pain did not go away.

If you have ever had nature call when the temperature is 12 below zero, you know it's not pleasant. So with time running out, the woman weighed her options. Her husband suggested that since she was wearing an all-white ski outfit, she should go off in the woods. No one would even notice, he assured her. The white will provide more than adequate camouflage. So she headed for the tree line.

She began disrobing and proceeded to do her thing. If you've ever parked on the side of a slope, you know there is a right way and a wrong way to set up your skis so you don't move. Anyone want to guess what happened?

That's right; she positioned her skis the wrong way. Without warning, the woman found herself skiing backward out-of-control, racing through the trees, somehow missing all of them and into another slope. Her back-end was bare, her pants were down around her knees and she was picking up speed. She continued backwards, totally-out-of-control, creating an unusual sight for other skiers.

The woman skied, if you define it loosely, back under the lift and finally collided violently with a pylon. The good news is that she stopped. The bad news is that she broke her arm and was unable to pull up her ski pants. Finally her husband arrived, put an end to her show, he went to get the ski patrol, who took her to a local hospital.

She was regrouping in the emergency room when a man with an obviously broken leg was put into the bed next to hers. Trying to make small talk, she asked, "So. How'd you break your leg?"

"It was the darnedest thing you ever saw," he said. "I was riding the ski-lift, and suddenly I couldn't believe my eyes. There was this crazy woman skiing backward out-of-control down the mountain with her bare bottom hanging out of her clothes and pants down around her knees. I leaned over to get a better look and I guess I moved too far. I fell off the lift. How'd you break your arm?"

Can't you just feel for that poor woman? She must have been having one of those why-is-this-happening-to-me moments. Unfortunately, they happen too often. Sometimes they are embarrassing. Other times they are simply painful.

This poor woman was doing what most of us try to do; she was simply trying to take care of her needs. It is something we all have to do. We have to take care of our needs. But if all we do is focus on us and taking care of ourselves and our needs, we will end up like this woman, embarrassed and broken.

One of the challenges of living in our culture is that we are taught well, to take care of our needs and ourselves first. But if you have ever found yourself embarrassed and broken, then listen carefully to this scripture.

"It was the year that King Uzziah died. I was tired. I was worried. I was overwhelmed. I wondered if there was any hope for our broken nation. I wondered if there was any hope for my family. So I went to worship.

"While there, I saw God in a powerful way. I saw messengers of God flying around the sanctuary singing praise to God, saying "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord." The whole place shook. And I was terrified.

"I said, 'I have no future. Woe is me. I am lost. I am a man of unclean lips and I live in the midst of a broken and unclean people. Yet even now, I have seen the Lord.'"

Isaiah is also broken. Change is happening all around him. The King has died. Changes are coming in the land. He isn't quite sure what those changes are going to mean. But he knows they will change his life. He is

smack dab in the middle of dealing with his hurt and pain and loss, and he does something truly important. *He turns to God and he goes to worship.*

Do you turn to God when you are dealing with hurt and pain and loss? Listen more to the story.

"Then a messenger flew to me and touched me on the lips with a live coal and said, 'Now that this has touched you, your sins are gone.' And I heard a voice. It was the voice of God and it said, 'There is much to be done. Whom shall I send and who will go for me.'

"And I said, 'Here am I. I will go.'"

In turning to God, he discovers something remarkable that happens. God calls to him to invite him to make a difference in the world for God. In a world where Isaiah was used to other people being in charge and responsible (like the King) he now realized that God wanted him to play a role as well, in making a difference for the world. And I believe that God wants you and me to play a role in making a difference for the world as well.

And if we are going to make a difference for God in this world, we need to place ourselves in a position to hear God, just like Isaiah placed himself in that position. That is what worship does, it can help renew us and reconnect us with God.

When we forget to take time to renew and reconnect with God we are attempt to live in our own strength and power, not God's. I am reminded by a little story that comes from Henri Nouwen. He is one of the people who taught me to pray. It is a story that he tells in an interview with *Leadership Magazine*.

In the interview he says, "Often we are not as pressed for time as much as we feel we are pressed for time. I remember several years ago becoming so pressed by the demands of teaching at Yale University, that I took a prayer sabbatical to the Trappist monastery at Geneseo, New York. No teaching, lecturing, or counseling - just solitude and prayer.

"The second day there, a group of students from Geneseo College and High School walked in and asked, 'Henri, can you give us a retreat?'

"Of course at the monastery that was not my decision, but I said to the abbot, 'I came here from the university to get away from that type of thing. These students have asked for five meditations, an enormous amount of work and preparation. I don't want to do it.'

"The abbot said, 'You're going to do it.'

"What do you mean? Why should I spend my sabbatical time preparing all those things?'

"Prepare?' he said. 'You've been a Christian for forty years and a priest for twenty, and a few high school students want to have a retreat. Why do you have to prepare? What those boys and girls want is to be a part of your life in God for a few days. If you pray half an hour in the morning, sing in our choir for an hour, and do your spiritual reading, you will have so much to say you could give ten retreats.'

"The question, you see, is not to prepare but to live in a state of ongoing preparedness so that when someone who is drowning in the world comes into your world, you are ready to reach out and help. It may be at four o'clock, six o'clock, or nine o'clock. One time you call it preaching, the next time teaching, or counseling, or later administration. But let them be a part of your life in God - that's ministering."

Those are wise words from a wise man. Our scripture for today, gives us a clue to how to develop a life of on-going preparedness, so that we can be the people God calls us to be. It invites us to come to God in worship. It invites us to bring our fears, our worries, our brokenness and give it to God, so we can be touched by God and healed by God before we are sent back out into the world. May God help us give ourselves to God. May God help us to live lives that are faithful.

Amen