

A spot for Lent (Psalm 121; John 3:1-17)

As we spin through our to-do lists, we can lose sight of our spot that orients our life: our faith.

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“Where are you looking? What is your spot?”

I ask this question many times while teaching a ballet class. In a turn, the body balances on the ball of the foot and spins. As dancers we work on “spotting,” the practice of choosing a spot on the wall that becomes our focal point during a turn. To avoid dizziness, the eyes remain focused on the spot. In each turn, the face whips around at the very last moment to return our stare to the same spot.

This focused attention of the eyes enables a ballerina to complete 32 *foute* turns or 16 counts of *chaine* turns across the floor without throwing up or reeling across the stage. A flailing arm or a step off balance is a telltale sign that the focal point has been lost. The body follows the clear or muddled focus of the eyes.

The demands of life often mimic the whirl of a turn. As we spin through our to-do lists, we can lose sight of our spot that orients our life: our faith. With the psalmist, we lift our eyes to the hills—or to the streets, churches, workplaces, malls, or smartphones—but our arms flail and our steps fail, because the hills are not a reliable source of strength.

The psalmist knows where to spot help and it’s not the hills, not other people, and not even one’s self. Our help comes from the Lord. Only God can ground us, clear our vision, and help us spin without reeling. The Lord will not let our foot be moved.

The Lord will keep us; the Lord will watch over our going out and coming in.

Like the psalmist, we must make an intentional choice to spot the Lord. We don't lose our spot by choice. No one wants to be dizzy or nauseous (except young children who like to spin around and around and then attempt to walk without falling). We don't want to feel helpless, at the mercy of the whirling world around us, so we must stake our spot. We look to the Lord. We keep our gaze steady and hold our sight, for our dust will always spin. God doesn't stop the spinning, but instead offers a spot to give our turning focus.

In John 3, Jesus offers Nicodemus a new spot. Nicodemus comes to Jesus in the night, awestruck with questions about the deeds of power that he and his fellow Pharisees have witnessed Jesus performing. He wonders, "How can these things be?" Jesus uses conversation to facilitate a new focal point in Nicodemus's life.

John's Gospel features many such conversations, in which Jesus takes time to talk face to face with seekers. He is not afraid to make eye contact and to offer the nearness of the kingdom of God as a counterpoint to the demands of the world. Jesus welcomes these talks that often create genuine relationship and open up a space for conversion.

Behavioral economist Jonathan Haidt writes in *The Righteous Mind* that one of the most potent and effective ways to enact personal change is through relationship. Conversion is made possible when affection forces us to entertain thoughts that are dissonant with our own opinions. For most humans, the only way we change our mind about an issue or a person is because we lean toward someone we love who thinks differently. In looking to them, we suspend our own opinions and see the world through their eyes. We change our spot.

Nicodemus leans toward the Lord and entertains a new faith focus. The psalmist leans toward the Lord and shifts her gaze from the hills to the creator and sustainer of life. In love, we too are invited to lean toward Christ.

This season of Lent, we can change our spot from ourselves to God. The world will keep spinning, but faith will keep us from dizziness.