

Holy wild card (Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19)

Why Howard Thurman dedicated his autobiography to a stranger

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Legendary pastor, teacher, and writer Howard Thurman might have dedicated his autobiography to any of a number of great luminaries who first encountered him while they were still students, such as Barbara Jordan, Alice Walker, and Martin Luther King Jr. It would have been a deeply meaningful gesture to dedicate it to his beloved grandmother. Instead, *With Head and Heart* is dedicated to an unknown stranger, without whom Thurman's sterling career would never have commenced.

"To the stranger in the railroad station in Daytona Beach," writes Thurman, "who restored my broken dream sixty-five years ago."

Young Thurman needed additional funds to cover the transport of his trunk in order to make the journey by train to attend high school. He writes:

I sat down on the steps of the railway station and cried my heart out. Presently I opened my eyes and saw before me a large pair of work shoes. My eyes crawled upward until I saw the man's face. He was a black man, dressed in overalls and a denim cap. As he looked down at me he rolled a cigarette and lit it. Then he said, "Boy, what in hell are you crying about?"

And I told him.

“If you’re trying to get out of this damn town to get an education, the least I can do is to help you. Come with me,” he said.

He took me around to the agent and asked, “How much does it take to send this boy’s trunk to Jacksonville?”

Then he took out his rawhide money bag and counted the money out. When the agent handed him the receipt, he handed it to me. Then, without a word, he turned and disappeared down the railroad track. I never saw him again.

Don’t let the low places fool you. Believing that God is everywhere invites us to be open to dynamic creative potential anywhere, including the valley of disappointment and discouragement. Remaining fixed on this hopeful perspective is essential to our not letting low places and feelings define and overwhelm us. Some of God’s best blessings are found in the spaces of our disdain. And there are gems in the valley that cannot be found on the mountaintop.

The holy wild card is this: In any given moment, God can be as direct and personal as God is mysterious.