

Tending Ancient Paths

The Paradigms, Posture, and Practices of Jesus

The Way of Radical Love Matthew 5:11-12

It was during the first month of my role as an associate that the Pastor I was working to support took me to visit the 'shut-ins' in the neighborhood. One lady was a remarkable woman who lived by herself but often would host young people in her home - she lived about 4 blocks away from the church building. What I remembered so much about her was that even in her frail state she was a woman of bold prayer - outside her little window in the West Central neighborhood she had a bush that she called her prayer bush. For Rhoda that little bush was the place of encounter in prayer. I actually did her funeral a few years later and have often walked and driven by her house that is now obviously owned by someone else - but I cannot go by her old house on Rockhill drive without looking at the bush outside her window. She told the story that she said Lord I don't drive so I need a church that I can walk to...she prayed that prayer before the church where I served ever started. Part of the reason she hosted young adults is that she had very little and lived on social security - yet she had such a courageous heart of faith - I loved praying with Rhoda.

About a block away was another woman whose husband had died years before I met her. She owned a gorgeous stately two story brick home on West Wayne street. I was told by my mentor that it was filled with gorgeous antiques - but I never saw them because anytime I went to visit her she we took the basement entrance. While she owned a home that had over 2000 square feet of space she lived in a small partially finished area, about 500 square feet, in her basement. She had meals delivered by meals on wheels, she obsessively clipped coupons, and sat on broken furniture. Now hear me its not that she lived so small that was remarkable it was the fact that she would remind anyone who came to visit from the church that her entire estate was willed to the church - the house its contents and close to a half million dollars in investments. What I remember most about her was the deep fear that held her mind and heart - she was afraid of almost everyone and everything. She was afraid - afraid of not having enough food - enough money. She feared that anyone coming to help her was trying to take something from her. She was a very unhappy fear filled woman. The thing I recall most about her was that no matter the topic she turned to fear. I don't even recall who did her funeral or even her name but I do remember how sad it was to see someone with abundance so held by fear causing them to live in poverty.

Fear. It is a horrible thing - yet fear is the fuel for so much human behavior isn't it? Let's be honest, fear has even found its way into the church. Unfortunately so much of the gospel I heard proclaimed was couched from a basis in fear - the fear of hell or the fear of punishment became motivators for the gospel and it is really a perversion of the gospel. Any form of the gospel that is based in fear is NOT the gospel. Fear beloved is the opposite of Love. Fear does not lead to courage but actually to cowardice.

We as followers of Jesus need to be discerning. Fear is the place where hell can actually become embodied in tyrannical leadership both inside and outside of the church. Hitler found support because the fear of instability had so gripped a people. Power systems of the world are nearly all based in fear - fear of losing control - fear of what we might lose - fear of not having enough - fear of what others think - fear of not being enough.

Beloved the Way of Jesus does not look like fear leading us to hunker down for survival - buckets in a basement lined with beans and rice - its more like looking at a bush and seeing another way to live. This is the fearless Posture of Jesus on the cross- arms stretched out- cruciform and proclaiming that there is another way to live and another force at work. The way of radical love!

The beauty of the way of Jesus is that it does not look, behave, or translate into fear but instead into love. The way of Jesus is Radical Love in the face of opposition - it is cross shaped cruciform love!

You know its easy for us to snap a picture at Meijer the night before a storm and poke fun of all the folks who are fretting and fearing - but the truth is that my response to opposition, especially painful opposition that comes from others, often leads me or at least invites me to 'the basement' in survival mode. Fear can do that to us. But we are invited to another way, the Jesus way of self giving, self sacrificial love.

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And the secret is simply this: **Christ in you!**

Yes, Christ in you bringing with him the hope of all glorious things to come. Col 1:27b, JB Phillips

Jesus said blessed are you when it hurts. 'But Jesus this stuff makes me want to go to the basement and hide.' Beloved that reaction is common to man. **When we want to hold our hands up and hide from what is causing us pain.** Jesus says something incredible in this final beatitude - you are blessed here and now! Of the 9 beatitudes - 7 of them carry a future tense promise. (I.E.: The merciful WILL receive mercy.) But please note this - the blessings of the first and last beatitudes come in the Present tense. The Poor and the Persecuted - theirs IS the Kingdom, so the way of Jesus is Now.

Beloved this is why we need to meditate early and often on the Incarnation and the Cross. The way of Jesus is the way of Love that leads to the Cross. We have so much noise out in the Christian world that communicates the idea that following Jesus leads to an overcoming triumphant life and yet nothing of Jesus' life on the earth actually looks triumphant. The truth is that after 3 years of walking with His disciples, He is abandoned, betrayed, falsely accused, and killed. Followers of Jesus often want to point to the resurrection and Jesus' victory as a reason to use victory language and talk about how 'blessed' we are to follow Jesus. **Jesus said follow me but being blessed is not about 'triumph' although there is that with Jesus walking with us, it is about the cross - the poor and persecuted- theirs IS the Kingdom.**

Mark Scandrette in his book The Ninefold Path of Jesus says: *The illusion that keeps us from living heroically is that death is the end.* Jesus reveals something to His followers that is transformative - death the greatest enemy of life and blessing - is inevitable but NOT final! This then is our confession; our soul is connected to the Eternal source of Life in Christ - I belong. **Therefore death cannot disrupt what is most essential to my well being - Christ in me the Hope of Glory. Beloved Jesus' invitation to His followers at the Cross was not just about facing difficulty and pain but living from a different perspective - not from fear but from love.** "Blessed are the persecuted...theirs IS the Kingdom" **So how would I live If I was not afraid to die?** Live with courageous hope and love, friends.

Die to the small separated self that believes what is here now is everything. Die to the idea of self as independent from its source, wake up to the reality of hope in life after life. The most important things last forever. Mark Scandrette

A translation the Matthew 5 Beatitudes from Brian Zahnd

*Blessed are those who are poor at being spiritual,
For the kingdom of heaven is well-suited for ordinary people.
Blessed are the depressed who mourn and grieve,
For they create space to encounter comfort from another.
Blessed are the gentle and trusting, who are not grasping and clutching,
For God will personally guarantee their share as heaven comes to earth.
Blessed are those who ache for the world to be made right,*

For them the government of God is a dream come true.

*Blessed are those who give mercy,
For they will get it back when they need it most.
Blessed are those who have a clean window in their soul,
For they will perceive God when and where others don't.
Blessed are the bridge-builders in a war-torn world,
For they are God's children working in the family business.
Blessed are those who are maligned and mistreated for the right reasons,
For the kingdom of heaven comes to earth amidst much persecution.*

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Ben and Denise, Please agree with us over these prayer needs for the next month...

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