

A Spirituality of Peacemaking

What I love about peacemaking is that it challenges and engages every part of my faith - theology, spiritual practice, study of scripture, worship, community, as well as my psychological and emotional idiosyncracies. Peacemaking is a paradox that calls us to both engage and detach, to speak prophetically to situations and events in our world while we also let go of them. How can such a thing be possible? It is as though we are called to be spiritual contortionists, to be "in the world" but not "of the world" in the words of Jesus, to speak out against injustice and at the same time let go of the ultimate result which alone resides in the providence of God.

Prophetic tradition

The prophetic tradition is engagement. The prophets of the Old Testament were less concerned with the weighty theological issues of the day or contemplating the nature of God than they were at holding up a mirror to their fellow Jews. They were not sequestered in the temple away from the majority of people. They were in the slums where people were suffering; they were in the marketplace where people were being cheated and in the courts where injustice was being adjudicated. Take for example this passage from the prophet Amos:

Hear this, you who trample upon the needy, and bring the poor of the land to an end, saying, "When will the new moon be over that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great, and deal deceitfully with false balances, that we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals, and sell the refuse of the wheat?" (Amos 8:4-6)

Can you hear the outrage in the words of Amos? Amos is characteristic of the prophets that see injustice not just as a problem but as a disaster, not just as an act of evil but as a catastrophe. In their impatience with injustice we get a profound insight into the heart of God; that God cares much more for the plight of the poor than for the spiritual high mindedness of religion.

Jesus very intentionally connected his ministry with the prophetic tradition when, as we read in Luke, he went into the temple and read from the prophet Isaiah,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18)

Jesus concluded his reading with the proclamation, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Our Christian tradition is directly tied to the prophets through the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. And as such, just as the prophets and Jesus were concerned for the welfare of widows and orphans, for justice as a manifestation of God's love, so we must also assume the mantle of peacemaking and social justice.

Detachment

And yet, Jesus himself warned us about too great an attachment to this world when he prayed in John 17 on behalf of his disciples that we should be "in the world" but not "of the world." Many Christians through the centuries have understood this passage to mean that we should avoid virtually all entanglements with the world. Some mystics and communities, like the Amish, have taken this admonishment to the extreme. But I dare say that many of us are at least a bit uncomfortable with mixing the spiritual and secular worlds too closely whether it is in matters of politics or advocacy. So what could this passage mean for those who are interested in a spirituality of peacemaking?

A spirituality of peacemaking means that we must incorporate detachment in at least two ways. First, we have to let go of the precise outcome of the situation, whether it be a problem of healing the environment or peace between nations. I may have what I think is the revealed

word of truth about what justice will look like in a situation only to be surprised when the principles involved have an entirely different view. Second, we have to leave the ultimate timing of the outcome to the providence of God. While we may pray and work for peace, we cannot take personal responsibility for the success or perceived lack of success of our work. We can't take responsibility for something that isn't our responsibility.

But how do we do that? We accomplish that by taking our ego out of the result. For me, this shows up in a couple of ways. One is that I get to practice being less concerned with the outcome or outward manifestation or numbers of people involved in an event than in using the work of community, communication, collaboration and building bridges to exercise my muscles of love and compassion.

The other way this shows up for me is that I am challenged to let go of the need to be "right." Can you hear the wailing and gnashing of teeth? If so, it is coming from me as I struggle to let go of one of my most cherished and private indulgences, the insistence on being right in conflicts about theology, politics, strategies, and on and on. What are your private indulgences that might be inhibiting your effectiveness as a peacemaker?

The reason this work is important for all of us is because we don't want to become spiritually schizophrenic, acting one way when we are at church and another way at work or home or in our relationships with others. Christ calls us to integrate our lives, body and soul, sacred and secular, heaven and earth. How do we know this? Because Jesus himself prayed for this result, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...."

May it be so,

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