

Resetting a Body of Broken Bones

In New Seeds of Contemplation, Thomas Merton writes: "As long as we are on earth the love that unites us will bring us suffering by our very contact with one another, because this love is the resetting of a Body of broken bones....There are two things which [people]...can do about the pain of disunion with other [people]. They can love or they can hate."

Our country is manifesting that suffering to high degree because of our politics and our belated recognition -- and sometimes lack of recognition -- of embedded racism. In these times, that suffering seems more visible and contains more volume, perhaps because of our many devices and the endless cycle of news. Then there's the quarantine and its many effects. Breaking bread together is mostly out of reach. Growing up in the South during the 50's and 60's, I thought intense and prolonged division and acrimony might be a thing of the past, but in some sense today is *déjà vu*.

Yet, there is an opportunity. People are starving for good news. No sensible person likes where we are as a country. We just don't know how to get to a better and different place -- which is the opportunity for the Church. In his short book, Being Disciples, Rowan Williams writes: "For the Christian disciple, human dignity...depends upon the recognition that every person is related to God before they are related to anything or anyone else....That means that whenever I face another human being, I face a mystery." Republican or Democrat. Every person: a mystery.

What if we changed our way of facing others with whom we disagree? What if instead of assuming that they are misguided or wrong or stupid or worse, we remembered they are related to God and therefore they are related to us? What if instead of focusing on our own righteousness and how correct our view of the world is, we admitted our own shortcomings? It may be that connecting with only people who agree with our political views feels good for our egos but is not so good for our souls. Of course, the poet says it best:

The Place Where We Are Right

by Yehuda Amichai

From the place where we are right
Flowers will never grow
In the spring.
The place where we are right
Is hard and trampled
Like a yard.
But doubts and loves
Dig up the world
Like a mole, a plow.

And a whisper will be heard in the place
Where the ruined
House once stood.

Perhaps the whisper is God telling us that God is resetting a body of broken bones and, if we will have doubts about our own self-righteousness and instead embrace the love of God and our neighbor as ourselves, then we can leave the hard, trampled yard and find the garden where the resurrected Lord gives everyone new life.

Yes, it's hard. Yes, it's daunting. However, remember, Jesus sends his disciples out and tells them not to be picky about whom they meet. Remember also that we in our baptism promised to "seek and serve Christ in all persons." "All" means the person who drives you crazy; who doesn't vote like you; who is the least person you want to meet. The choice is to stay in our hard barren yard or to hear the Lord's whisper saying "welcome to communion," and then to allow the Lord both to use us as a mole or a plow as well as witness God's love digging the hard yard in which we live.

This is our calling. May we embrace it.

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