It's Not Just About Your Soul

Many seem to think that faith is only about one's soul. They say faith is private. It's only between you and God as if God is not interested in anything but our souls and our spiritual lives. This notion is intriguing as I wonder what good is faith if it's not lived, or seen or experienced?

The Bible, seen as the faith story of one tribal people called the Hebrews, narrates their lives and struggles throughout history as they live under the ruling power of one political Empire or another. Their Biblical story is about life- hence its populated with folks who are peasants and royals, slaves and slave holders, refugees and foreigners, asylum seekers and tax collectors, wealthy and poor, and so on.

The Hebrews themselves were oppressed foreigners in Egypt, exiled aliens in Babylon, and an exploited "minority" under Roman occupation. They had to comply with the Roman demand for a census, a political act to count the people and gather information, in order to determine who should pay taxes, who should fight in the army, and how the Roman Empire would manage the population and allocate resources.

Jesus himself was a refugee, an asylum seeker, fleeing Herod's wrath. Later, Jesus was killed by capital punishment in the Roman mode of the cross. His death preceded by a public court presided by a governor of the ruling empire. Does this story sound only about one's soul? Doesn't it also include oppression and injustice, money and power, occupation and exile, taxes and war, governors and politicians? Yes it does and that makes the Biblical story a political one.

Many of us do not want to think that the Bible is political, hence the church should not talk about politics. Yet, we cannot rid the Bible of politics even if we tired, because politics is a part of life. It is the way we live in this world, in states that are governed by politicians. That does not make politics bad or evil. Politics by its virtue is simply running the affairs of the state and it does not have to be divisive. What makes politics divisive is not politics itself but partisanship.

It is partisanship that divides us into "us and them". As we separate ourselves into parties that increasingly are at odds we are losing the fact that we, as a people, are one nation no matter our political preference.

Faith is not just about our soul or spiritual life. Faith is also about the soul of the world, the healing of the earth, the restoration of all creation and the whole universe. Faith is all life. Yes, faith is about going into your heart to nurture grace and compassion so that you can go out to live a life of grace and compassion which reaches beyond yourself. Faith is not only about what's going on *within you*, it is also about how, *what is within you is pouring without, touching other lives*.

The perspective that faith is private and is only about my soul is not only skewed but it also ignores Jesus. Jesus spoke truth to power to the unjust rulers of the day, stood with the outcast, taught reconciliation, talked about poverty and injustice, and healing the broken.

Many of us may be uncomfortable about talking politics in the church but if we are honest, we will recognize that we cannot pretend that poverty and inequality, racism and prejudice, violence and abuse do not exist. While opening our eyes to the lives of our struggling neighbors, we cannot but recognize Jesus in them, awakening to the fact that politics really matters for them.

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