

*Fantasy #4**I Thought Jesus was “The Man.”*

It is only as we stop forcing our way into his Kingdom and have ears to hear the resurrected Jesus that we will know him as he is and not as we wish him to be.

Be careful how you hope in Jesus.

Luke tells us the story of two disciples on their way to Emmaus who encounter the resurrected Jesus and do not recognize him (24:13-35). One of the disciples summarizes the situation with these words, “We were hoping it was he who was going to redeem Israel.” The state of the mind of those who had trusted Christ is revealed in these words. They had real hope in Jesus and were sad because their hope was not realized. There could have been a problem on one of two fronts here. Either Jesus had failed or their hope was misplaced. The gospel story makes it clear that the latter was the problem. They are not alone. Many have clung to a hope that has to die before the glory of the resurrection can be experienced.

The story in Luke is instructive for us because it reveals three facts about abiding through the pain and disappointment of Good Friday and Saturday. First, it illustrates the place for an honest confession of disappointment with God. Second, Jesus explained the Scriptures to the disciples in a new way. There was a paradigm shift in their thinking that was necessary before they could entertain a new hope. Third, as they broke bread together, their eyes were opened and they recognized a resurrected Jesus that they had not seen before. Was it something about the breaking of bread that linked this moment to the eve of the crucifixion where he spoke of his death and resurrection with them? What they could not hear at that supper before his death, they could now understand after his resurrection.

I am going to suggest that, like the first disciples, we too must abide through the pain and loss of life and hope as we know it in order to see the resurrected Jesus. This will involve three steps for most of us.

Acknowledging your disappointment.

First we will have to be honest with God in confessing our disappointment with regard to His lack of cooperation with our expectations. We will have to come to him with our proof texts highlighted, our prayer journal entries sighted, and our arguments carefully laid out. Like the Psalmist, we need to make our confident case before God and ask, “Why?” “What did I do wrong?” “Where were you?”

I preached a message once with the title, “Have you forgiven God?” One of the elders in our church took offense at the suggestion that we would ever be so brash as to express such disrespect toward the sovereign Lord of the universe. I tried to assure him that God would not be offended by our honesty. Certainly, God does not need to be forgiven least of all by his creatures. But this fact does not address the point - many of us feel as though God has

done us wrong. It is really hard for many of us to express the honest hurts of our heart because it does seem disrespectful to God. Who are we to answer back to God? But we cannot forget that the Psalmist did not have this problem when he expressed his disappointment at the thought of the wicked prospering while the righteous suffer when God had seemed to promise just the opposite.

We readily acknowledge our need to confess our sins but why not also our unmet expectations? God cannot work with our hearts until we are honest with him, not only about our disobedience but also about our disappointments. It has become fashionable in the church to give God the credit when things look good, prayers are answered, goals for the building fund are met, etc. But when a prayer request is not granted, relationships are not reconciled, goals for the building fund are not met we don't make mention of it, hoping people will not notice or we give some explanation usually blaming ourselves or someone else for the disappointment. What we seldom do is express our honest disappointment to God or to others with the tragic result that we do not change. God can use our disappointment to open our eyes to more enlightened expectations and hopes. He can use our wounds to bring us into an intimate relationship with Christ and the true Kingdom. What He cannot do is renew a mind that is stubbornly refusing to face the fact that its hopes may have been misplaced, its faith may have been misguided, and its true feelings of disappointment may have been repressed. Such a stubborn heart is simply destined to be recycled in the chaos of suffering until it learns to renew its mind or, God forbid, rejects the faith.

Looking at Scripture through different glasses.

Second, we will have to look again at the Scripture and recognize that it may say something quite different than what we had assumed. Let me illustrate this by referencing a popular text from Proverbs. "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it. (22:6). Many parents have claimed this as a promise as they try to medicate the pain and suffering of watching a child make foolish self-destructive decisions. Deep in our hearts we all know that not every child raised in a good home with loving parents will stay on track. Is it possible that we have misread this text. Is it possible that we have here not an inviolate law of nature but rather a wise saying. When Ben Franklin gave us, "early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise." we recognize that this is a good rule of thumb. People who take care of themselves are better off than those who do not. People who are responsible in the use of their time tend to prosper in ways that others do not. But we would never say that simply by rising and retiring early one will automatically be healthy, wealthy, and wise. Proverbs are not promises, they are wise sayings.

Further, is it possible that this proverb about child rearing is teaching that if we allow a child to have his way (train him "according to his way" or as he would like) when he is young then when he is old he will still be a fool or never grow up? This is actually an interpretation that seems truer to the Hebrew text and to life.

Note how often the subject of suffering appears in the Bible. Note also how suffering is addressed. If you read the texts of Scripture looking for references to suffering you will be surprised at what you see. The fact is we tend to look at the Bible through glasses tinted by our environment and its passion for a certain kind of hope. Be prepared to change the tint of the glasses worn by the eyes of your heart.

Greeting the Jesus you never knew.

Philip Yancey has written two wonderful books, the titles of which could be used to summarize the lessons from this chapter. The first was published in 1980 under the title “Disappointed with God”. The second in 1995 was entitled “The Jesus I never knew.” Both books make an excellent expansion of this chapter. It is all too easy to see Jesus as a reflection of ourselves or our culture’s ideal and not to see him as he is, a challenge to our senses. It is only as we are willing to mourn the loss of our carnal but beautiful dreams that we will know the true power of the resurrection. It is only as we stop forcing our way into the Kingdom and have ears to hear the resurrected Jesus that we will know him as he is and not as we wish him to be.

The sky and sea were slate gray matching the color of the ferry that carried me to Macau China from the port of Hong Kong. This was a perfect context for the gray mood of my soul as I sat looking over the water and asking God why my 40 some years had failed to materialize in the dreams of my youth and the promises of God’s blessing. My family was full of pain, an autistic child, a depressed wife, a difficult job, and on and on I went with my pity party. I prayed, “Why could things not have been different? So much pain and disappointment” There have been very few times when I have felt that God spoke to me but this was one of them. This is what flashed like a mighty lighthouse into my dark downward spiral. “Do you want to really see how things could have been different? Let me remind you of all the foolish decisions that I delivered you from. Let me show you how messed up your life would have been had I not blessed you so richly. Let me help you see that what you have is a blessing.” I answered, “How is all this a blessing?” God’s second response came as quickly and easily as the first. “When you were baptized into my Son and promised to follow him, you knew that you would be asked to serve the needs of others not your own. You willingly accepted and anticipated the prospect of making a difference in the lives of others. Now that you are there and doing just what was expected, why are you thinking that some strange thing has happened to you. Do you not see that your son and wife are the objects of my love and that I want to use you to show it. Don’t complain, but rather worship and rejoice that you share the life of your Lord.” My mood was dramatically and permanently changed. I have not been able to sustain a decent pity party since that ferry ride to Macau.

Are you willing to mourn the loss of what you had hoped he would be and do for you? Are you willing to look at the Scriptures with fresh eyes and ears? Are you willing to welcome a Jesus that you did not know before and in seeing him see yourself as never before?

Looking for the good in “Good Friday”?

“When I come to you, brethren,” writes Paul to the Corinthians, “I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

Christians call them the Triduum Sacrum, the three most sacred days of the year, Maundy Thursday, so called because that night before he was betrayed he gave the command, the mandatum, that we should love one another. Good Friday, or as some suggest “God’s Friday” is the second day. The third is Easter – the Great Vigil of Resurrection conquest.

It is the second day that gets our attention in this chapter. Every human life, conceived from eternity and destined to eternity, here finds its story truly told. The ancient Christian fathers spoke of the Christ event as the “recapitulation” of the entire human drama. There is no part of the story of Jesus that is more revealing of the human nature than the cross. Some call this killing senseless but in it we are brought to our senses. Here we find out who we most truly are because here is the One who is what we are called to be. Jesus cries, “come follow me.” Follow him there? We recoil, We close our ears. We hurry on to Easter. But we will not know what to do with Easter’s light if we shun the friendship of the darkness that is God’s context for that light.

Edward Shillito writes these verses after the horrors of World War I where an entire generation of young men were killed by artillery and machine guns.

If we have never sought, we seek Thee now;
Thine eyes burn through the dark, out only stars;
We must have sight of thorn-pricks on They brow;
We must have Thee, O Jesus of the Scars.

The heavens frighten us; they are too calm;
In all the universe we have no place;
Our wounds are hurting us; where is the balm?
Lord Jesus, by Thy Scars, we claim Thy grace.

If, when the doors are shut. Thou drawest near,
Only reveal those hands, that side of Thine;
We know today what wounds are, have no fear,
Show us Thy Scars, we know the countersign.

The other gods were strong; but Thou wast weak;
They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;
But to our wounds only God’s wounds can speak,
And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.

We need to repent of our flight from the pain and suffering that not only hurt us so but mercifully opens us to an intimate walk with God.