



TRAIL THOUGHTS

TREKKING TOWARD GOD'S ADVENTUROUS FUTURE

A QUARTERLY PASTORAL LETTER FROM PAUL MUNDEY, MODERATOR, CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

WINTER 2021

SURRENDER

GREETINGS IN THE STRONG NAME OF JESUS!

There is much self-posturing these days. My opinion, my interpretation, my tribe, my truth is conclusive and supreme. But scripture's accent lands in a different place, stressing humility, sacrifice, self-emptying...surrender.

The Cross, our center point during Lent, graphically underscores this counter-cultural leaning. As Paul notes in Philippians 2, "though [Jesus] existed in the form of God [he] did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking on the form of a slave...sharing in human nature. He humbled himself, by becoming obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross! As a result God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name" (Phil 2:6-9 NET).

As Michael Gorman recounts, "For Paul, the will of God is known in essence in the obedient death of Jesus. [Thus] in concrete and specific ways...God's will is known only when one offers oneself...daily as a living sacrifice to one's rightful Lord."¹ Thus, authentic discipleship emerges from surrender to the merciful sway of Jesus. The Apostle Paul affirms such recasting of faithfulness. "[T]he love of Christ controls us since we have concluded...Christ died for all; therefore, all have died...[thus] those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised" (2 Cor 5:14-15 NET).

Such self-emptying results in a far-reaching, rescued life saved *from* iniquity and saved *for* a new pattern of being. As Brenda Colijn notes:

"We are rescued [through Christ] from sin [and] Satan...to experience healing, [bringing] life in...fullness. We are also saved *for a purpose*: good works and holy living...Salvation [then] is not a one-time event completed at conversion. It involves a growth in relationship and in wholeness...past, present and future... [So] we should look forward with anticipation [engaging] in the work God has called us to do [now]."²

Thus, Christ's sacrifice, our salvation, is not just a "ticket to heaven" but an invitation to life. It's a contemporary undertaking challenging us to abandon the unholy and adopt aspects of Jesus not matching our current routine and ethic. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer stresses, "When Christ calls a man [or woman], he bids him [or her] come and die...In fact, every command of Jesus is a call to die, with all our affections and lusts." But as Bonhoeffer reminds us: "[W]e do not want to die...[nevertheless]...Jesus Christ and his call are necessarily our death as well as our life."³

This is such a hard truth, but it's a wise truth, as it reminds us that the most faithful thing we can do is to die to self and a fixation on my gain. *And* a preoccupation with my opinion. One of the glaring logjams of contemporary culture and church is the bent to "do life" within a narrow bandwidth, bolstering my "rightness." Often referred to as an echo chamber, it's a closed system stubbornly maintaining my ego and opinion, eroding any sense of humility and empathy, especially toward those who differ from us. As Christine Emba reflects:

"The tendency to promote one's favored narrative is natural, but too much confirmation distances us from other perspectives and makes us unable to see the truth when it's finally presented—what the 'Echo

Chamber' researchers referred to as 'a kind of cognitive inoculation.' And in the end, a constant us-vs.-them mentality depersonalizes the holders of alternative views."⁴

Sadly, we *are* becoming inoculated—closed to other stances—depersonalizing holders of alternative views, addicted to the echo of our voice and opinion as us-vs.-them escalates. But it's Lent, and another opinion rises, as Jesus sheds blood on a Cross, modeling another way of living—echoing not his preference but the preference of the Father (Matthew 26:36-46)—self-emptying, giving up self and gain for God and others.

"Who would have believed [it]...He sprouted up like a twig before God, like a root out of parched soil; he had no stately form or majesty that might catch our attention, no special appearance that we should want to follow him. He was despised and rejected by people...people hid their faces from him; he [was considered] insignificant. But...he carried our pain...He was wounded because of our rebellious deeds, crushed because of our sins; he endured punishment that made us well; because of his wounds we have been healed." (Isaiah 53:1-5 NET)

I pray such surrender will inspire our surrender, prompting radical sacrifice to God, as we jettison any obsession with self-opinion and gain, echoing not our preference but the Father's longing.

At the beginning of each year, United Methodists recite a covenant prayer. Crafted by Richard Alleine, it was first voiced by John Wesley in 1755, advancing a radical yielding to God, calling us beyond personal opinion and desire.

"I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me...with whom you will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you, let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing; I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, glorious and blessed God...you are mine, and I am yours. So be it."⁵

Wesley reminds us that our first love must not be a cause, person, want, or opinion, but God in Christ who calls us to filter everything first through Him as crucified Messiah. Thus, the most faithful life is a Cross-shaped life, obedient to Christ, echoing not our preference but God's preference, dying to self yet anticipating resurrection in Jesus!

With expectation,



Paul Munday, Moderator, Church of the Brethren

Discussion Starters / Questions

1. Moderator Paul contends: "There is much self-posturing these days. My opinion, my interpretation, my tribe is conclusive and supreme. But scripture's accent...[stresses] humility, sacrifice, self-emptying...surrender." Give and discuss examples of culture's accent on self-posturing and scripture's accent on humility.
2. Brenda Colijn advances that salvation in Christ is not just salvation *from*, but salvation *for*. What are we saved from – and what are we saved for? Why are both emphases needed for faithful discipleship?
3. Moderator Paul observes: "One of the glaring logjams of contemporary culture and church is a bent to live within a narrow bandwidth that reinforces my 'rightness.'" He refers to such a tendency as an echo chamber. Have you ever lived within an echo chamber or been aware of one, in either culture or church?
4. Reread John Wesley's Covenant Prayer. Where do you find his prayer relevant and convicting? Where do you find his prayer "too much" or unrealistic?

To Dig Deeper

Brenda Colijn. *Images of Salvation in the New Testament*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010.

E. Stanley Jones. *Victory Through Surrender*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018.

¹Michael Gorman. *Cruciformity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001. p. 134.

²Brenda Colijn. *Images of Salvation in the New Testament*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010. p. 141-142.

³Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *The Cost of Discipleship*. New York: Macmillan, 1973. p. 99.

⁴<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2016/07/14/confirmed-echo-chambers-exist-on-social-media-but-what-can-we-do-about-them/>

⁵John Wesley. A Covenant with God (Modern Version).