

In Acceptance Lieth Peace

Luke 22.39-46

FUPC

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Acceptance is the golden key that unlocks the door to personal freedom, unflinching courage, inner peace, and unmovable poise in the face of life's storms. When we learn to accept our lives, accept our failures, accept other people, accept a health challenge, accept disappointed expectations, and accept that life won't always unfold as perfectly as we want it to, then we can figure out how to transcend all that we wish were different. Until we accept our lives, we will be prisoners. Prisoners? Yes. Prisoners of our own fears, prejudices, expectations, regrets, failures and worry. Acceptance doesn't come naturally to us, but it's a quality of character that can be developed and mastered.

Jesus has something to teach us about acceptance. Do you remember his prayer in Gethsemane? "God, is there any way to let this cup pass from me? Yet not my will, but your will be done." What cup? The cup of suffering. The cup of physical pain. The cup of shame and rejection. The cup of misunderstanding, abandonment and betrayal. When Jesus prayed that prayer, the worst fears and nightmares of his life came true. His three best friends fell asleep when he needed them the most. He was arrested and dragged before the Priests and Pharisees, listened to false witness in a sham trial, and then hauled before Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, to be judged and sentenced to death.

Yet throughout that night that began in agonizing prayer and into the next day, we see a man who was poised, self-possessed, unafraid, trusting himself to the mystery of God's plan for his life. He accepted what he wished to avoid. He submitted to what he could not change. He embraced his destiny and calling though it would lead through the valley of torture, shame and death. That's what acceptance does. It allows us to transcend and transform everything we wish was different in our lives into something that has meaning, purpose, value and possibly even joy.

But lets rewind a few days from that dark lonely night in the garden. It was the Sabbath and Jesus had arrived at his destination... Bethany just outside Jerusalem. No doubt he had stayed with friends. Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived there. The time had come. He could have walked away from it all. He could have had a nice quiet life in Nazareth making furniture and repairing homes. He could have had a wife and children and grandchildren. He could have grown old, respected as a wise elder in his community, surrounded by friends and family, secure in the knowledge of their love and respect.

But he didn't walk away. He accepted who he was, what his purpose was, why he had been born and what was expected of him. We see him moving with determination and clarity toward the climax of what his life was about. At his direction two of his followers found a donkey for him to sit on. He was making a statement about the Kingdom of God. A King coming into a city riding a horse came prepared for battle. If there was trouble, he was ready. The horse was a symbol of power and might and violence. But if the king came riding on a donkey, it was a different message. That symbolic act said that the King arrived in peace, with a heart for friendship and regard for the people. It was a victory parade but not about the triumph of power and force. The kingdom Jesus preached about was a kingdom rooted in unconditional love, boundless grace, miraculous transformation and unquenchable peace.

Maybe some in the crowd hoped for a king riding on a horse. After all, they were a captive colony of Rome and paid taxes to a foreign government. Finally, they have their own king – and their expectations are sky high that this king will free them and fulfill their dreams for greatness and autonomy.

He has all the qualifications: descended from King David, Fearless as he faced his enemies head on and called them out for their hypocrisy, Loving unconditionally as he embraced the marginalized and socially unacceptable people they all avoided, Powerful because they had watched him heal the blind, the lame, the diseased and even raise the dead. And he was wise because they all had listened to his parables and sermons.

While their imaginations are running wild, they cut palm branches and take off their coats and lay them on the ground in acts of gratitude, adoration and excitement for what they believe Jesus will bring to them. Expectations. They thought he was their Messiah Deliverer... the one to bring them glory.

And so when it turns out that after the parade and victorious happy entry into Jerusalem, Jesus clears the Temple and radically challenges their familiar customs, and then when they see him attacked by the religious leaders and not defend himself... and then when he is arrested by Roman soldiers and does nothing to defend himself or his followers... they cannot ACCEPT him. Their expectations ran head on into the reality of Jesus' calling to a different definition of Messiah and Deliverer – and they could not ACCEPT who he really was. So they screamed for him to die. Angry, disappointed, feeling betrayed, disillusioned and raging... they called for him to die.

From the Garden of Gethsemane to the Triumphant Entry that brought Jesus into the city... Acceptance or the inability and unwillingness to accept made all the difference in the world. I spent some time this week thinking about this idea of Acceptance and what we can learn from Jesus and from the crowd.

I began today by saying that Acceptance is the golden key that unlocks the door to personal freedom, unflinching courage, inner peace, and unmovable poise in the face of life's storms. By acceptance, I don't mean resignation, giving up or believing that nothing will ever change. It's much deeper and broader than that. Acceptance is the effective alternative to denying or fighting reality, wishing things were different or fixating on how something "should" be.

Pain in life is inevitable. Misunderstanding and failure are merely signs that we are human. Expectations are often disappointed. Life isn't perfect. As hard as we try, as much as we wish it were... life isn't perfect. Change is inevitable. Growth is a choice. Fear, Pain, Anger, Disappointment are inevitable. Suffering and misery are not.

Acceptance goes beyond tolerating something we don't like or wish was different. Toleration can feel like a defeat. Toleration is good but it doesn't go far enough. It doesn't really transform us at a deep enough level to help us transcend what we're facing. We can tolerate something without ever really accepting it. Accepting something is when we recognize the reality of a situation without attempting to judge it, change it, protest its presence or run away from it. Acceptance embraces the notion that our journey is full of laughter and tears, hugs and fists, screams and whispers, pain and vitality, hope and despair, abundance and scarcity, life and death. And they all have something to teach us and a way of transforming us from the deepest places where no one ever sees.

A few weeks ago, I spoke about Praying IN and Praying OUT. A few of you have spoken to me since then about how those insights helped you to reframe a situation you were facing or to deal with a reality that you had been denying or wishing were different. This is similar idea... Acceptance is like Praying IN to a certain reality and discovering that in the center of it, there is a golden prize, a truth, an insight, a perspective, a delicious joy that we might never have found if we'd tried to run away or change things by force or by miracle.

Another word is “complicated blessing”. Maybe its not something we’d desire or pray to have in our life but there it is. Now what are we going to do about it? Its up to us. When we can’t change what we’re given, we can make a choice to see what it has to offer us, how it can teach us, deepen us and open up new worlds of understanding to us. Complicated Blessings turn out to be those things we might not choose but that make all the difference in the world and afterward, we see what riches of wisdom, grace and love we would have missed out on if it had never occurred.

I’m going to end with a poem written by Amy Carmichael. She was born in Ireland in the late 19th century and died in 1950. She never married but devoted her life to the service of God. At first she worked in the British Isles with children and brought life changing love to thousands of lives through her own vibrant, authentic and deep devotion to God. She eventually ended up in India and was led to a community in which children were being used and abused sexually for religious purposes. Thousands of young children were rescued through her efforts. While she was in her 50’s she was diagnosed with a debilitating neurological disease that kept her bedridden for the last 20 years of her life.

I can only imagine the frustration and despair she might have felt. But in her illness, when she accepted its reality and prayed her way INTO the possibilities her new situation brought to her... she discovered that she loved to write. And from her pen there came an amazing treasure of books, tracts, and meditations that have touched millions of people all around the world. I’m one of them. Amy Carmichael’s works have taught me, encouraged me, sustained me and inspired me ever since I discovered them when I was about 20 years old. I want to share my favorite poem from her pen... it’s entitled, “In Acceptance Lieth Peace”.

He said, “I will forget the dying faces,
The empty places,
They shall be filled again.
O voice moaning deep within me, cease.”
But vain the word: vain, vain.
Not in forgetting lieth peace.

He said, “I will accept the breaking sorrow
Which God tomorrow
Will to His son explain.”
Then did the turmoil deep within me cease.
Not vain the word, not vain.
For in acceptance lieth peace.

He said, “I will crowd action upon action
The strife of faction
Shall stir me and sustain;
O tears that drown the fire of manhood, cease.”
But vain the word: vain, vain.
Not in endeavor lieth peace.

Amen.

He said, “I will withdraw me and be quiet,
Why meddle in life’s riot?
Shut be my door to pain.
Desire thou dost befool me, thou shalt cease.”
But vain the word, vain, vain
Not in aloofness lieth peace.

He said, “I will submit, I am defeated.
God hath depleted
My life of its rich gain.
O futile murmurings, why will ye not cease?”
But vain the word: vain, vain.
Not in submission lieth peace.