

Resources for Further Reflection:

Monday: The King Throws a Party, and the Queen Says “No”

Jesus, in his solidarity with the marginal ones is moved to compassion. Compassion constitutes a radical form of criticism, for it announces that the hurt is to be taken seriously, that the hurt is not to be accepted as normal and natural but is an abnormal and unacceptable condition for humanness. In the arrangement of "lawfulness" in Jesus' time, as in the ancient empire of Pharaoh, the one unpermitted quality of relation was compassion. Empires are never built or maintained on the basis of compassion. The norms of law (social control) are never accommodated to persons, but persons are accommodated to the norms. Otherwise the norms will collapse and with them the whole power arrangement. Thus the compassion of Jesus is to be understood not simply as a personal emotional reaction but as a public criticism in which he dares to act upon his concern against the entire numbness of his social context. Empires live by numbness. Empires, in their militarism, expect numbness about the human cost of war. Corporate economies expect blindness to the cost in terms of poverty and exploitation. Governments and societies of domination go to great lengths to keep the numbness intact. Jesus penetrates the numbness by his compassion and with his compassion takes the first step by making visible the odd abnormality that had become business as usual. Thus compassion that might be seen simply as generous goodwill is in fact criticism of the system, forces, and ideologies that produce the hurt. Jesus enters into the hurt and finally comes to embody it."

The Prophetic Imagination, Walter Brueggemann,

So it is that belonging is the place where we grow to maturity and discover what it means to be human and to act in a human way. It is the place we need in order to live and to act in society in justice, in truth, without seeking power, privileges, and honors for our won self-glory. ...It is the place where our deepest self rises up into our consciousness and so we become more fully ourselves, more human.

Jean Vanier

The intention to open the heart and mind is what's essential. If we do good deeds with an attitude of superiority or outrage, we simply add more aggression to the planet. ...If we draw a line down the center of a room and tell those in it to put themselves in the category of "virtuous" or "nonvirtuous," are we truly more liberated because we choose "virtuous"? More likely we're just more arrogant and proud. Bodhisattvas are to be found among thieves and prostitutes and murderers.

Pema Chodron

Queries:

Why do you think the satraps and governors are content to play “less than” to the king?

Do you see parallels between this and where your place in society gives you “better than” status?

How, in our social structure, are you placed in a “better than” position?”

Where do you cooperate with this placement?

When have you defended against challenges to your status?

What neighbors have you missed out on because of this?

How, in your own mind and heart, do you place yourself in a “better than” position?

Resources for Further Reflection:

Tuesday: On Saying “No” to the Ways of Empire

“The *abject* is “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, position, rules.”

Timothy Beal, quoting Kristeva

Love, having no geography, knows no boundaries.

Truman Capote

“Esther’s name can be translated as a form of the Hebrew verb ‘to hide.’ ‘I will hide.’ ‘I am hiding.’ In many ways the book of Esther is a book of hiding... preoccupied with the possibilities of veiling, misrepresenting, masking, and closeting otherness; of being more than one appears when the ‘more’ is too much for the system to bear, and could explode the order of relations between us and them as it now stands; of hiding the fact that we always exceed the identities that frame us, the categories that map our bodies and thus locate us on the political atlas.”

Timothy Beal

When Martin Buber, the great Jewish philosopher and theologian, was asked, “Where is God?” he was wise enough not to give the cliché answers: God is everywhere; God is found in churches and synagogues. Buber would answer that God is found in relationships. God is not found *in* people; God is found *between* people. When you and I are truly attuned to each other, god comes down and fills the space between us so that we are connected, not separated. Both love and true friendship are more than a way of knowing that we matter to someone else. They are a way of mattering to the world, bringing God into a world that would otherwise be a vale of selfishness and loneliness.

Harold S. Kushner

Queries:

Where am I obedient to the requirements of Empire in ways that violate my conscience?

What parts of me are still in hiding?

Identity and Self as Portrayed in Esther:

“identity” can be hidden; “identity” can be replaced

Self, as defined by *better- than other*, is problematic.

Self, as defined by *not-other*, is problematic.

Both are self as derived from being over against *other* –over against someone or something else, rather than self as an image of God.

Resources for Further Reflection:

Wednesday: *The Other*, and The Politics of “Us and Them”

I was under great temptations sometimes, and my inward sufferings were heavy; but I could find none to open my condition to but the Lord alone, unto whom I cried night and day. And I went back into Nottinghamshire, and there the Lord shewed me that the natures of those things which were hurtful without were within, in the hearts and minds of wicked [people]. The natures of dogs, swine, vipers, of Sodom and Egypt, Pharaoh, Cain, Ishmael, Esau, etc. The natures of these I saw within, though people had been looking without. And I cried to the Lord, saying, "Why should I be thus, seeing I was never addicted to commit those evils?" And the Lord answered that it was needful I should have a sense of all conditions, how else should I speak to all conditions; and in this I saw the infinite love of God. I saw also that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. And in that also I saw the infinite love of God; and I had great openings.

George Fox, *Journal*, ed. J.L. Nickalls

The excluded, I believe, live certain values that we all need to discover and to live ourselves before we can become truly human. It is not just a question of performing good deeds for those who are excluded but of being open and vulnerable to them in order to receive the life that they can offer; it is to become their friends. If we start to include the disadvantaged [here Vanier means the intellectually disadvantaged, but I would broaden that to all who are “different”] in our lives and enter into heartfelt relationships with them, they will change things in us. They will call us to be people of mutual trust, to take time to listen and be with each other. They will call us out from our individualism and need for power into belonging to each other and being open to others. They will break down the prejudices and protective walls that give rise to exclusion in the first place. They will then start to effect our human organizations, revealing new ways of being and walking together.

Jean Vanier

Haman’s identification with the king at the center of royal power is thus created over against the projection of the other Jew. The self who projects his other becomes visible even as the other does. Images of self and not-self emerge simultaneously, and grow sharper in non relation to each other. It is a double emergence. But the double emergence of the self and his object is also a double erasing, for images of the one and the other become more sharply defined as the ambiguities in each of them and the overlaps between them are erased.

Timothy Beal

“...otherness takes form over against self, and self takes form over against otherness; and the closer one looks at that opposition, that ‘over against,’ the more elusive it becomes. Then another still small voice whispers a wonderfully unsettling secret: self intertwines with other and other with self.”
Timothy Beal

But I say to you who listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

Luke 6:27-8 (NRSV)

The Bible advises us to love our neighbors and also our enemies, probably because these are generally the same people.

G.K.Chesterton

Is it the self-evidence, the “real” distinctive difference of the one over against the other that, throughout history, has elicited the politics of hatred, genocide, and or gynocide? Or is it the ambiguities of identity, so difficult for so many of us to accept, the instability of the self and the image of the not-self it projects? How does desire come into play—the desire for the other, for a clear sense of self, for a clearly definable problem? And as the desire for a definable problem leads to the desire for a final solution, how does desire turn to objectification, and then to alienation, and then to a cold violence?

Timothy Beal

Vanier describes communion as what ‘...is at the heart of the mystery of our humanity. It means accepting the presence of another inside oneself, as well as accepting the reciprocal call to enter into another.’ Communion is thus the undoing of the wound of creating oneself via the making of another “other.” It is an undoing of the self/other dichotomy towards two selves in relationship.

Christopher Sammond

Queries:

Is there some part of my NYYM community which I regard as “other?”

Is there some way in which that “other” may be reflected within myself?

Resources for Further Reflection:

Thursday: Taking it to God in Prayer

Our salvation is wrought out thereby with fear and trembling so that the old house is shaken down with his old stuff: and with the old life and the old, rocky stony heart: and a new heart and a new mind and new life is wrought in which God is served in his new covenant in which people are brought to God: and shall not as they therein abide never more depart from him. George Fox, *Journal*, ed. J.L. Nickalls

[L]et the little thing in you that is pure and simple, lead you, and there to bow and bend and confess; and this will be your restoration to God, to give all you have to the Holy, who when He has befooled and cursed your wisdom, and brought down your high conceits, and bound the strong man, and tied the colt to the vine; then will He arise in power, who is meek and holy, and rule in your strength.... And you shall say no more, I am weak and can do nothing, but all things through Him that gives you strength.

Perhaps best to eliminate this here, as it was quoted by me in the session, as well as in this handout, here?

James Nayler, 1659

A door opened to the imprisoned seed, or captives in the world

God, I offer myself to Thee, to build with me and to do with me as thou wilt.
Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do thy will.
Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help,
of Thy power, Thy love, and Thy way of life.
May I do Thy will always. -Third Step Prayer from AA Big Book

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. And I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always, though I may seem lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Thomas Merton

*We pray to God the Power,
But God the Lover
Answer our Prayers*

Sri Chinmoy

“[Martin Luther]King buried his face in his hands at the kitchen table. He admitted to himself that he was afraid, that he had nothing left, that the people would falter if they looked to him for strength. Then he said as much out loud. He spoke the name of no deity, but his doubts spilled out as a prayer, ending, “I’ve come to the point where I can’t face it alone.” As he spoke these words, the fears suddenly began to melt away. He became intensely aware of what he called an “inner voice” telling him to do what he thought was right. Such simplicity worked miracles, bringing a shudder of relief and the courage to face anything. It was for King the first transcendent experience of his life. ...For King, the moment awakened and confirmed his belief that the essence of religion was not a grand metaphysical idea but something personal, grounded in experience—something that opened up mysteriously beyond the predicaments of human beings in their frailest and noblest moments.

Taylor Branch

We are called to love the world as God loves the world. Loving this deeply, this openly, will break our hearts. When our hearts are broken wide-open, if we are willing to remain anchored in love, we find our capacity to love magnified. It is a cycle of life and brokenness and life renewed perpetually. Our calling is nothing less than this.

Wendell Berry, in *Jayber Crow*

*And think not, you can direct the course of love; for love,
if it finds you worthy, directs your course.*

Khalil Gibran

We use the term “repent” extensively in our Christian vocabulary, usually meaning by it to confess our sine, acknowledge how far off course we’ve wandered, and promise to turn our lives in a new direction. ...the word *metanoia*, usually translated as “repentance,” literally means to go “beyond the mind.” It means to escape from the orbit of the egoic operating system, which by virtue of its own internal hardwiring is always going to see the world in terms of polarized opposites, and move instead into that nondual knowingness of the heart which can see and live from the perspective of wholeness. This is the central message of Jesus. This is what the Kingdom of Heaven is all about. “Let’s get into the larger mind,” he says. “This is what it looks like.”

Cynthia Bourgeault

And the deepest level of communication is not communication but communion. It is wordless. It is beyond words and beyond speech, and it is beyond concept. Not that we discover a new unity. We discover an older unity. My dear [sisters and] brothers, we are already one, but we imagine that we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we are.

Thomas Merton

“Ultimately, we have just one moral duty: to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves, more and more peace, and to reflect it toward others. And the more peace there is in us, the more peace there will also be in our troubled world.”

— Etty Hillesum