

Vulnerability - Tuesday, September 27, 2016

Did you ever imagine that what we call “vulnerability” might just be the key to ongoing growth? In my experience, healthily vulnerable people use every occasion to expand, change, and grow. Yet it is a risky position to live undefended, in a kind of constant openness to the other—because it means others could sometimes actually wound us. Indeed, *vulnera* comes from the Latin for “to wound.” But only if we take this risk do we also allow the opposite possibility: the other might also gift us, free us, and even love us.

If and when we can live an honestly vulnerable life—the life we see mirrored in a God who is described as three persons perfectly handing themselves over, emptying themselves out, and then fully receiving what has been handed over—there will always be a centrifugal force flowing through, out, and beyond us. Then our spiritual life simply becomes “the imitation of God” (see Ephesians 5:1), as impossible as this sounds to our ordinary ears.

This, then, seems to be the work of the Spirit: to keep you vulnerable to life and love itself and to resist all that destroys the Life Flow. Notice that the major metaphors for the Spirit are always dynamic, energetic, and moving: elusive wind, descending dove, falling fire, and flowing water. Spirit-led people never stop growing and changing and recognizing the new moment of opportunity. How strange to think that so much of religion became worship of the status quo and a neurotic fear of failure. It does make sense, though, when we consider that the ego hates and fears change and failure.

What, then, is the path to holiness? It’s the same as the path to wholeness. And we are never “there” yet. We are always just *in the river*. Don’t try to push the river or make the river happen; it is already happening, and you cannot stop it. All you can do is recognize it, enjoy it, and ever more fully allow it to carry you.

As John O’Donohue put it:

*I would love to live
Like a river flows,
Carried by the surprise
Of its own unfolding.*

This is the great surprise, and for some a disappointment: this divine Flow has very little to do with you. The Flow doesn’t have to do with you being perfect, right, belonging to the right group, or even understanding the Flow. Jesus never has any such checklist test before he heals someone. He just says, as it were, “Are you going to ask for or allow yourself to be touched? If so, let’s go!”

The touchable ones are the healed ones; it’s pretty much that simple. There’s no doctrinal or moral test whatsoever. Jesus doesn’t check if the people he heals are Jewish, gay, baptized, or in their first marriage. There’s only the one question, which he asks in various ways:

Do you want to be healed?

If the answer is a vulnerable, trusting one, the Flow always happens, and the person is always healed, usually on several levels. That is the real New Testament message, much more than miraculous medical cures.

(From “Daily Meditations” by Richard Rohr)