



SPIRIT IN THE DESERT

Exodus 3:10-15

But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” He said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.” But Moses said to God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’:

This is my name forever,
and this my title for all generations.

Matthew 16:21-28

Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

“For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

*Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live and move and have
our being.*

In 2008, I was Director of Christian Growth Services at a faith-based treatment facility. We had a management retreat one summer and it was led by the Ken Blanchard, Lead Like Jesus group.

Remuda Ranch had five hundred employees so there were a lot of departments and a lot of managers and having a lot of managers meant we had a lot of egos.

One day our trainer was teaching from the “Lead Like Jesus” materials.

We sat at tables of eight and my table included the clinical director. Blanchard presented a scenario to us with a follow-up question to be discussed in our groups.

During the Civil War, Colonel Charles Scott received notification his wife had died in a steamship collision. Devastated, he asked his superior for a brief absence to bury his wife and comfort his children. His request was denied.

Heartbroken, Scott went up the command and appealed to the Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, but Stanton harshly refused. Desperate, Scott felt sure if he could meet with the President, he would be granted the time. Instead, Scott was met by an overwhelmed and exhausted President. Lincoln snapped at Scott saying he could not afford to give him time in the middle of war. He said, “There are men depending on you and you must wait till the war is over.” Scott returned to his battalion.

Our reflection question was, “Did President Lincoln make the correct decision?”

We discussed it at our table, and I was surprised at the difficulty this table of Christian managers had in determining what was right. Declining Scott and caring for the troops or allowing him to grieve with his children. The clinical director was adamant that the decision by Lincoln was hard but nevertheless had to be made.

Then Blanchard told us the rest of the story.

President Lincoln could not sleep that night. He wrestled with his conscience and realized he had allowed his pressure to override his humanity. Early the next day Lincoln went to Scott’s quarters and personally asked his forgiveness saying his behavior the night before was wrong. Then he summoned his own carriage and had Scott taken to the pier to board a steamship home to be with his family.

The conscience of President Lincoln showed up like Jesus’s rebuking of Peter.

After Jesus described to the disciples his impending suffering and death, Peter lashed out. I think it is totally understandable for Peter to want to redirect Jesus away from what appeared to Peter to be doomsday thinking. Not wanting Jesus to give in to those who wanted to take his life would be only human. But Peter was standing in 'The Way' of Jesus. The path out of the human condition is The Way of Love.

The way of Jesus is a movement of voluntary suffering and death toward a new life and freedom.

It appears Jesus will call out any form of self-preservation and survival. Anything the ego fears that prevents our inner freedom. This ego demand is about 'my way' not 'The Way.' I have been rebuked way too many times!

The Way, Jesus, is about life, death and resurrection of our ego-driven lives on this earth. It is how Jesus models the cure for the human condition.

Jesus said to pick up your cross then follow him.

To carry the cross is not to be burdened, but to carry the burden of life to the end of our ego dominance. We then can lay our lives on the vertical beam of *utter dependance on God* and its intersection with the horizontal beam of *interdependence with others*. When this form of humility and self-awareness arrives, resurrection occurs.

This is not an easy path, yet Jesus confirms it as "The Way" over and over again. For example, Jesus modeled it in the wilderness. Then, just as Satan tempted Jesus, Peter tempted Jesus to fight back. You can't blame Jesus for having a little PTSD in his response to Peter.

When we succumb to the temptation of a strong ego, we will be brought back through the way of love. The ego of control, certainty and illusion will always be subject to the eventual path of death on the cross.

Ask one of my brothers and sisters in recovery. They'll tell you all about the human condition and resurrection.

A great deal of energy is used up to manage and control the outcomes of our effort. It takes constant human effort to sustain a self-made identity, title, and program for happiness. It is exhausting. The burden and image of this human life of ego is not those on the margins, it is the man in a three-piece suit dragging the heavy burden of

his false self strategies into every meeting with others that are doing the same. They are addicted to their pattern of happiness that cannot be sustained. The true self is yet to be revealed.

The breaking of our ego attachments takes an act of love. For Jesus to run interference on Peter's ego is a divine intervention on the The Way of love.

Could it be that Peter had become attached to Jesus rather than following The Way? I think Jesus calling Peter "Satan" took care of that!

Jesus' commitment to divine things over human things would surely lead to his suffering and death. Why? Because the path of the human condition will lead to an invitation to admit our powerlessness. That just doesn't preach well in a culture of ego-driven individualism. Not in Jesus' time or our time. It does preach well when someone has had enough, and the angels are summoned to care for a tired mind and weary body.

Here's the sad part. Many church institutions operate on egos. No matter how organic a church begins, if growth and success are the key to a successful church, the wonderful vibe that developed must be monetized to maintain it. This is the downside to the American institution. Spirituality suffers in a world that measures success through material gain.

We constantly drop our anchor into identity and physical possessions rather than divine things.

This is why we, like Nicodemus, must be conceived again through a willful surrender.

Then we can declare, "Behold, all things have become new!"

That to me my friends, is salvation! Trappist monk Thomas Merton was asked if he was saved, he responded, "yes I am. Everyday." Saved from my false self, and my ego.

Jesus harshly pushed away the Satan he saw in Peter's ego, and he thwarted Satan messing with the mystery of transformation through his suffering and death.

Thanks be to The Way of Love.

Amen

