

Beautiful

Romans 10:5-15

But what does it say? "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.

The burning belief of the heart and the inevitable confession of the mouth. We are disciples of the heart and mouth. They are meant to work together in faith, and not be separated.

Yesterday I watched an interview with the playwright Arthur Miller. Many of us know him from his essential US plays *The Crucible* and *Death of a Salesman*. They are on every high school and college reading list of American literature.

It is sometimes easy to forget that each of these works was deeply engrained in the historical fabric of the our 20th Century. *Death of a Salesman* is after World War II and the darker side of the American dream. Then there is *The Crucible*. It appears to be play about the Salem Witch trials, yet Miller makes it seem so prescient.

In all reality Miller was contending with the aftermath of another "Red" scare in the United States where artists were being called before Congress by Joseph McCarthy to say whether they were Socialists, Communists, Marxists!

Arthur Miller refused to name friends whom he knew to be part of the socialist movement in the United States. Yet, one of his closest

friends and film collaborator Elia Kazan, under pressure, decided to provide the committee with a list of names.

The interviewer focuses on this particular piece of history after showing a clip from *The Crucible*. Miller contends that he was not surprised that his friend took a very different tact than he did morally. His problem was that it took the focus away from the trial itself to focus on each person's individual action in the trial itself.

When pushed about it Miller, who was Jewish, made a very concise assessment by saying, "When times get tough it is who you are, not what you believe."

This simple statement shocked me at first, but the more I unpacked it the more I understood the sentiment was at the center of an essential understanding of faith. If what you have put your faith in does not transform you, does not internally impel your inner compass, then it is not faith but rote intellectual belief and ascent to a group of concepts.

A personal story of sorts might help. I loved my Aunt Gwynn. We would visit her house in Brule, Nebraska and I always looked forward to it. She cooked us sausage and pancakes and her son and I played penny anti poker in his room listening to Van Halen.

One birthday she gave me a gift that I cherish to this day. It is the jean quilt that many of you have seen. I love that quilt.

Yet, I had forgotten to do something that I was taught was incredibly important to any exchange of gift. I knew it was

important, but I had neglected to do this simple act. It was to thank her and express my gratitude.

I was young and just assumed that relatives had to love me because of my rapier wit and people pleasing personality. Yet, the next time I encountered my aunt she was cold to me.

I tried everything. Funny faces, annoying jokes, and personal stories. Nothing worked.

Finally she let me know how disappointed she was that I had not acknowledged the gift she had spent so much time making for me. I didn't even tell her if I liked it.

At first, I was ashamed, and I vociferously apologized out of my shame. However, shame is a shallow emotion that if stopped at does not get to the heart of the change. It was more than shame; I was also sad I had hurt my aunt.

It made me think about gratitude and it has changed my relationship to that concept to this day. I am not always the best at saying thank you, but I do know that some people love me and sacrifice for me.

Thank you, letters are easy, being thankful is more of an internal change.

When the rise of Nazism was underway a Young and important theologian named Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote an amazing and challenging book called *The Cost of Discipleship* in which he challenges the church resisting Hitler to exhibit Costly Grace as opposed to Cheap Grace. He says:

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble; it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock.

There are many people who emotionally, passionately believe something with their mouths, yet when a time of trouble is at their door, they will abandon those beliefs in self-interest and personal security. Right now it is fashionable to affirm Black Lives Matter but are completely unprepared to sacrifice for the full and total equality of all people. Your Black Lives Matter poster will matter little if you do not have the believe in your heart.

With our faith it is the same. Unless we have something that essentially matters in all aspects of our existence and is not merely a side product of social conventions then it is a culture of the mouth and not a passion of the heart. If your politics does more to influence our view of society, ethics, and morality than the Good News of Jesus Christ then that is not faith, but an assent to powerful political entities and their marketing. If advertising or desires sway our social choices more than the Sermon on the Mount, then we are

too invested in the economy and not invested enough in salvation. If good manners, class loyalty, sex roles, or our upbringing supersedes the freedom that we can find through the Holy Spirit then we are bound deeper to the structures around us than in transforming them through the renewing of our minds.

It is no wonder that Paul reminds us the words of Moses by saying:

But what does it say? "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.

Paul thankfully does not end there though. He adds this hopeful note:

And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

You are the disciples sent. You are about to do beautiful things if you have the heart and the mouth to live them. God will not leave you abandoned to this task. You will be walking with others on this road who are being transformed by the renewing power of the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God.