

True Freedom

As I parked in the Northern District of Columbia parking lot of the building that looked like a large estate, I saw Daryl standing near the entrance waiting to meet me. Daryl always looked a bit uncomfortable in his imposing and lanky frame. Well over 6 feet in height I never saw him wearing anything but a suit. He always had a learned and staccato speech pattern which was efficient with words and intimidating. Even though retired for many years from the foreign service, Daryl was someone whom it was clear leaders and power brokers still relied upon for his service. Daryl had been a prominent Ambassador in Latin American, and his son was also an important Ambassador as well for the United States government.

All of this stately importance though was secondary to the reason that I was meeting him that day. He wanted me to visit his wife but wanted me to visit her with him present.

Joan was much more than a typical Republican President's Ambassador. Joan was an accomplished artist who taught weaving and displayed her work in prominent showings in galleries. I was told by his son that she was the glue of the family. The creative force. The one that humanized all of the family.

As we reached her room the personality of Daryl changed dramatically. He softened into a mushy, lovey, man whom I had never seen before. He was transformed into a different human in this woman's presence.

"There she is! My love!" He said with an excitement that could not have been faked.

Joan made no movement, made a little head move, and began to give an expression that looked as between confusion and a smile.

"This is our pastor that I told you about."

Joan may have made a noise, a slight motion?

“Would you like to go for a walk darling? Brian you can come with us.”

Cradling this woman under his lanky arms we walked down the hall, out the front door and down the block on this Spring day.

Daryl did a lot of talking. Explaining his days, talking about children, and praising her dress.

I walked with this lovely couple listening to Daryl attempt to communicate with his beloved wife of over 50 years who now was in the depths of Alzheimer’s disease.

As we left the nursing home behind Daryl explained the decline in a very clinical way. Then he described the changes that would happen ahead until it would finally take the life of his beloved wife.

“Do you believe in the Christianity Brian?” he asked me.

“Yes.” I answered.

“What do you believe?” He asked me.

As I explained the contents of my faith, Daryl related to me the loss of his. I assured him that even though he might not choose God at this point in his life, I knew that God chose him. God accepted him.

Through the months ahead his beloved wife would succumb to the disease which so cruelly takes so much away from its patients and the family around.

I presided at the funeral. The family was extremely grateful. The son was a bit surprised that his father had taken so much to me as a pastor. He couldn’t understand what had made him open to a person of faith. This had never happened before.

I would love to say that I watched this man have a great reconciliation of faith, but I think he was on the road. What I do know was that he was opening to me. When he was very sick with pneumonia, I was asked to come visit him by his son.

We had almost the identical conversation about faith once again. I told him that I was not sure that he had a choice in the matter. That as a good Calvinist I must tell him that God might be choosing him despite his lack of faith. He gave me a wry smile and talked of his admiration for his Grandfather's faith.

When Daryl died, I believe that he was accepted into the arms of our redeemer. Just as I believe that Joan completed her course toward the completion of her Baptism in Jesus Christ.

How can I have hope in such things? I believe in the possible of redemption through Jesus Christ. I believe that it is not us, but something greater than ourselves that is bringing us to God. It is nothing we could do, it is the grace afforded us through the Spirit of Christ bringing us toward completing

One of the sinful hallmarks of our society by people of any class or political persuasion is the lack of faith in the possibility that people change. We look at others as if the die is cast and that there will be no possibility of them escaping the bounds of nature and nurture.

The cynicism of a faith that does not believe in the possibility of change is a radical sort of nihilism. Unbelief in change forces us to slumber into a status quo where nostalgia is the best our church can achieve. At its worse it allows us to give ourselves to resigning ourselves to a continual participation in sin making us more and more inhuman.

This, of course, is antithetical to the faith of which we commit ourselves as a community. Paul exhorts us to no longer stay stuck in the sins of

yesterday, but to choose the new life afforded us by our participation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

No matter what slough of despond you find yourself in. No matter whether you believe the negative life you find yourself in has trapped you. No matter whether self-hatred has spiraled you into places you never believed you would explore. No matter whether the entire world has rejected you. There is hope.

If we do not believe those who steal, murder, or lie can be redeemed we are no longer followers of Christ. If you do not hold out the hope of redemption for friends or relatives who hold to intolerance, and the vile sin of racism I dare say it matters little whether you believe in a physical resurrection of Jesus Christ or not. If there is not hope for the worst person the definition of wickedness, then there is no hope at all.

So, live into the hope that you have been given as the inheritance of your salvation. Hope in new life is the radical gift of freedom from Jesus Christ in this world of virus, economic calamities, violence, and division. This is true freedom. It is not a freedom that can be promised by a politician at a rally, it is not something that can be completely guaranteed by a military, or a television preacher for a love offering to their ministry. This is the kernel of hope, maybe even the size of a mustard seed, that another world is possible. Another world is possible if we have enough faith to hope.

Thanks be to God.