

Adventure (Part Two)

“Go and make disciples of all nations”

Reflection 41 in the series “A New World in the Morning”

Here’s the great adventure to which Jesus called his first followers – flawed, confused and doubting though they were:

Go and make disciples of all nations ...
 Baptize them ...
 Teach them what I have commanded you.

Just get on with what you know is right. You’ve seen me; teach me! Get on with the task. Fight through the doubt and the hesitancy and the “Yeah, but’s”! And you will create a new world. Heaven will reign on earth. That’s what the kingdom of heaven means – a new world concerned with human flourishing everywhere, a new world that cares for the oppressed, the marginalized and the poor, a new world that embodies God’s love in practical, meaningful, inclusive, healing ways.

And so Jesus calls us to a life of high adventure, the highest adventure imaginable, saving the world, making disciples of all nations. It’s an absolutely amazing call, astonishing, really. And hardly ever in the 2000 years since has it been answered. In our pursuit of doctrinal purity and institutional power hardly ever has this call been answered. And so we are where we are today.

Near the end of Broadway’s *Man of La Mancha* there is a fabulous scene. The writer Cervantes is being cross-examined by The Duke. He is accused of being a lunatic. He should see “life as it is.” He (Cervantes) answers:

I have lived nearly fifty years;
 and I have seen life as it is.
 Pain, misery, hunger ... cruelty beyond belief.
 I have heard the singing from the taverns
 and the moans from bundles of filth on the streets.
 I have been a soldier and seen my comrades
 fall in battle ... or die more slowly under the lash in Africa.
 I have held them in my arms at the final moment.

These were men who saw life as it is,
 yet they died despairing.
 No glory, no gallant last words
 ... only their eyes filled with confusion,
 whimpering the question: “Why?”
 I do not think they asked why they were dying,
 but why they had lived.
 (He rises, and through the following speech
 moves into the character of DON QUIXOTE)
 When life itself seems lunatic,

who knows where madness lies?
 Perhaps to be too practical is madness.
 To surrender dreams – this may be madness.
 To seek treasure where there is only trash.
 Too much sanity may be madness.
 And maddest of all,
 to see life as it is and not as it should be.

Jesus calls us to life not as it is but as it should be. And so he calls us to high adventure and to a faith of high adventure. He calls us to consciousness of the sacred that is always everywhere all around us, to sense beyond the appearances the presence of God, to recognize God's love and beauty in all that is. He calls us to find joy again in a re-enchanted world open to wonder and awe, to mystery and, yes, emphatically, to miracle. He calls us to a world lit by resurrection and open to the Spirit of God. He calls to contest the patterns of prejudice and discrimination everywhere. He calls us to work for global community concerned with human flourishing everywhere, for global community dedicated to the care of our planet and committed to justice and equality, to solutions to poverty, violence and oppression. He calls us to seek out understandings of Scripture that are true to historical context and open to multiple perspectives; he calls us not to worship the words of the text but the God revealed through those words. He calls us to authentic faith and practices that make sense on heart level and out in the streets. He calls us to those deep truths of kindness and inclusiveness that we already know in our hearts to be true. And in the end he brings us to radiant, unshakable joy, to a state of beatitude or bliss that nothing and no one can take from us.

Here's what happens. When we do what we know is kind and loving and caring and compassionate, when we work to enlarge circles of care and compassion, we will find people everywhere who agree with us. We will make disciples of all nations. And we will all work together for a new world, a better world. And there will be a great global spiritual awakening, one that maybe comes only every 500 years or so, a great spiritual shift, a cultural transformation when people will learn to respect one another in their differences and learn to learn from one another, and discover that this too was part of what Jesus was trying to get us to understand. Now far from things falling apart, things will come together. Some things, in fact, need to fall apart, and in their falling apart space is made for what is new and better.

So it has always been when the world comes to its great turning points. All such times are at first unsettling, but they also offer great hope. They challenge what isn't working in the world as it is. They point to new insight and direction. And in the end, historically this is what always happens: faith catches fire again and dynamically spreads. This time truly globally: a new world in the morning.

May we lift our eyes across the earth and into the future. May we understand the times in which we live. May we trust God and what God is accomplishing in our world. Oh, the places you'll go! The things you will see! The things you will do! And still you doubt, just a little.

Go and make disciples of all nations ...
 Baptize them ...

Teach them what I have commanded you.

Just get on with what you know is right. If you'll just do it, Jesus says, I can see you past your doubts. I will become for you Immanuel, "God with you." I will be with you. I will always be with you, always to the very end of the age.

– Dale Pauls