

he said 'is my fiftieth birthday, and I have spent it scraping
shit off the bedroom wall!'

[kin]
pibury

I knew then that we were kindred spirits, for the only kind
of holiness I can cope with is that which is firmly grounded
in reality. As I said before, loving is a costly business and
one needs an earthly sense of humour to survive. This poem
by an English Benedictine monk is one of my favourites, for
it has no illusions about the pain of discipleship:

balz'ev

fisher

knit

huda

oz d'ev'ev

zaps'ev
ev

pat'ev
sp'ev

Anoint the wounds
of my spirit
with the balm
of forgiveness.
Pour the oil
of your calm
upon the waters
of my heart.
Take the squeal
of frustration
from the wheels of my passion
that the power
of your tenderness
may smooth
the way I love.
That the tedium
of giving
in the risk of surrender
and the reaching
out naked
to a world
that must wound
may be kindled fresh daily
in a blaze of compassion
- that the grain may fall gladly
to burst in the ground
- and the harvest abound.

Ralph Wright

A New Commandment

My little children . . .
I give you a new commandment:
love one another . . .

John 13:33-34

In the next few chapters I will be exploring the manner of
Jesus' loving as shown in some of the familiar gospel stories.
But before I embark upon the New Testament teaching, I
would like to look back for a moment to the Old Testament
understanding of love. Why, I wonder, did Jesus say that his
command to love was new? He and his disciples were steeped
in the Jewish scriptures and must have been deeply familiar
with theology of the tenderness of God and his predilection
for the poor, the suffering and the oppressed. Throughout the
Old Testament runs the theme of Hesed, the faithful covenant
love of God for his people. We meet it first in Exodus, in the
marvellous stories of Moses' encounters with God on Mount
Sinai. True, God tells Moses that he may neither know his
name nor see his face, but in amazing, scary moments in the
cloud, when all the Israelites are cowering in their tents, God
reveals himself. 'Yahweh, Yahweh, a God of tenderness and
compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness'
(Exod. 34:6). I love the rich counterpoint between images of
the mysterious unknowable God of Sinai and the God who is
tender and full of compassion. In Hosea we find the same
message expressed in different, more poetic imagery. The
prophet likens God to a father besotted with love for his child,
loving him unconditionally, in spite of neglect and rejection:

mu'ev'ev
(ev'ev'ev)

prose'ev

ev'ev'ev
ev'ev'ev

ev'ev'ev

ev'ev'ev

ev'ev'ev

(ev'ev'ev)

ev'ev'ev

ev'ev'ev

When Israel was a child I loved him,
and I called my son out of Egypt.

But the more I called to them, the further they went from me . . .

отца
проща?

I led them with reins of kindness,
with leading strings of love.
I was like someone who lifts an infant
close against his cheek;
stooping down to him I gave him his food.

Hos. 11:1-4

pg 1

It is worth exploring for a minute the richness of meaning in the Hebrew word *Hesed*, which is variously translated as 'mercy', '(loving) kindness', 'steadfast love', 'constancy', 'loyalty'. This is the word which is translated as *love tenderly* in the passage from Micah 6, which I have used as a framework for understanding the demands on the carer, and it appears again in the lines from Exodus quoted above. The interesting thing about this word is that although it refers primarily to God's relationship with his people, to his faithfulness within the covenant relationship, it applies also to the peoples' reciprocal covenant obligation to God and to each other.

встречает

A covenant is by its nature a relationship, a bond between two parties, and God's loyalty to his promise to protect and sustain his people in times of hardship and distress laid upon them the obligation to support each other, especially the weaker members of the community:

It is he who sees justice done for the orphan and the widow, who loves the stranger and gives him food and clothing. Love the stranger then, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. It is Yahweh your God you must fear and serve; you must cling to him; in his name take your oaths. (Deut. 10:18-20)

однажды

These themes of God's love for his people and the demand that they should care for one another run throughout the books of the Old Testament. They emerge with special power and clarity in the books of the prophets, especially the eighth-century writers Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah, as they denounce injustice and ritual worship by those who oppress the poor. Like Amos, Isaiah was outspoken in his condemnation of those whose secret lives were at odds with their religious observance:

архивариус, одиоз

What are your endless sacrifices to me says Yahweh? . . .

When you stretch out your hands
I turn my eyes away.
You may multiply your prayers,
I shall not listen.

Your hands are covered with blood,
wash, make yourself clean.
Take your wrong-doing out of my sight.
Cease to do evil.

Learn to do good,
search for justice,
help the oppressed,
be just to the orphan,
plead for the widow.

проща?

Isa. 1:11,15-17

зуба? / да?

It is tempting to read this as a quaint invective against the people of a past age, but it requires no great leap of the imagination to apply it to, for example, a mass of thanksgiving to celebrate the anniversary of a military coup, such as is held each year in the Chilean capital, Santiago. Sermons such as this are indeed preached in our own times. Men like Archbishop Helder Camara of Brazil and South African Bishop Desmond Tutu have survived to be a thorn in the flesh of a repressive government. Others, like Martin Luther King or Poland's Father Jerzy Popieluszko have died a martyr's death because their love drove them to speak out against injustice. El Salvador's Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated as he celebrated mass just two days after he told his people:

приват
за?

трн

No soldier is obliged to obey an order contrary to the law of God. Nobody has to fulfil an immoral law. Now it is time that you recover your consciences and that you first obey your conscience rather than an order to sin. The church, defender of the rights of God, of the human dignity of the person, cannot remain shut up before such an abomination. We want the government to take seriously that reforms achieved with so much blood serve no one. In the name of God, then, and in the name of this suffering people, whose cries rise to the heavens, every day more clamorously, I beg you, I ask you, I order you in the name of

свѣтлой!

оповѣсти!

God: stop the repression. (Quoted in Desmond Keogh, Romero, El Salvador's Martyr)

divided
at
life
behind a
powderline
upfront
spelling
killing
(beating)
spohvina
neglecting
wring

It would be easy to comfort ourselves that we of the peaceful nations give our tithes to the church and to charities like Oxfam and Amnesty International and that our hands are clean. But alas, life is not quite so simple. The book that I use for my night prayers reminds me uncomfortably of the sins of an affluent society which I so conveniently forget: that most of the time I am quite blind to need and suffering outside my immediate circle; that I give no more than a passing thought to pollution, erosion and acid rain, and that quite frankly my concern is with the here and now, not for those who will follow me in the next generation. Like the rest of the nation, I share in the corporate guilt of arms production, in the hypocrisy that wails over natural disasters like earthquakes while scientists in their laboratories prostitute their intelligence and training by making weapons that could destroy us all. Again, like the rest of my countrymen, I live my life in complicity with the exploitation of the peoples who produce the raw materials for the things which sustain my very comfortable existence. All this and so much more. As John Harriott puts it:

We should be in mourning,
we should be in tears,
our blinds perpetually drawn.
We are to be lords of the earth,
not of each other.

from *Our World*

Let him who is without sin throw the first stone! When the knowledge of my own infidelity makes me sick at heart, I turn to the prayers set for Thursday:

Loving God, close your eyes to our sins . . .
Make us whole, steadfast in spirit.
Broken are our bones, yet you can heal us
and we shall leap for joy and dance again.

Jim Cotter from *Prayer at Night*

Jim Cotter's prayers have a special power both because of their poetry and their understanding of human weakness. It is not easy to rebuke without humiliating, to condemn sin

negotiate substitute

stout
mura
hang
up front

without leaving the sinner in despair. Just as the carer must hold death and resurrection in the same paschal overview, so must the pastor hold correction, forgiveness and hope together in one package, so that the consciousness of woundedness and sin is not the burden that crushes us, but rather the impulse to a change of heart. This is the essence of Christian pastoral ministry, the new commandment of Jesus:

I give you a new commandment:
love one another;
just as I have loved you,
you also must love one another.
By this love you have for one another,
everyone will know that you are my disciples.

John 13:34-35

Love one another
JUST AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.

Here we have a new dimension to an old law. Jesus' disciples must not only be just to the oppressed, give food to the hungry, and shelter the homeless poor. They must go that extra mile, turn the other cheek and hand over their trousers to the man who demands their jacket. Jesus' disciples are invited to make a unilateral declaration of love on strangers and enemies - for even corrupt businessmen and military dictators are good to their friends! This is why I spoke of the harsh and terrible love of our God made man - and why so many of us, like the rich young man, find the words of the gospel too hard and either turn sadly away or try to water down its demands. As the Benedictine monk Tom Cullinan puts it:

frail
a kindly
divine
to be fed

The trouble is that we have taken hold of a stallion and we have domesticated it into a sort of riding-school pony: but the gospel is really a stallion that cannot be domesticated. (*The Roots of Social Justice*)

hriebee
♡