

Title: The pilgrim's way: a journey toward non-dualism

Texts: Psalm 84, Isaiah 40:21-31, Luke 2:22-40

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One gorgeous morning at a juvenile probation camps Father Boyle (a Jesuit Priest) is there to say the Mass.

He sees a kid that he didn't know yet and he is standing by himself staring at the Mountains. Father Boyle asks the kid: "how are you doing?"

"Well", he replied, "I'm a little low on faith." That seems an odd place to start, as the homies say, "Right out da gate". Homies is what gang members call each other – its their people, their kin.

But the kid added these words quickly, "You know what I do when I'm low on faith?" Father Boyle shakes his head and leans in. For he admits – his faith's gas tank has been known to hover at 'Empty', so he wanted to know.

The kid continued: "I stand right here and I look at them mountains," he says.. "I stare at the blue sky and white clouds. I breathe in this clean air"

"Then I say to myself: 'God did this'. I know everything will be alright".

Gregory Boyle, Barking to the Choir

Podcast: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/greg-boyle-the-calling-of-delight-gangs-service-and-kinship/id150892556?i=1000460178308>

Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

Isaiah 40:21-31

Second Isaiah writes while the People of God are in Exile. First the Assyrians came and captured the tribes of Israel. And then the Babylonians came to the tribes of Judah, took some away, and destroyed Jerusalem.

And it is in this place of destruction, desolation and captivity, that their theology of creation develops.

For when we face isolation, when we face oppression, when we are confused. That is when we look for One who is able to make something out of nothing, to create what we feel inadequate to do.

Walter Brueggemann writes in his Old Testament theology:

“In the face of that challenge, Israel’s despairing doubt is countered by the witness of faith that asserts: “Yahweh (the LORD) is stronger... “

It is testimony to Yahweh’s work as Creator that counters the ostensive power of Assyria and Babylon.

The large claim is made for Yahweh creating heaven and earth. However, the large claim moves from cosmic scope to the reality of Israel... To derivative confidence in their own capacity to act in freedom, apart from the threat of their oppressors.”

Israel’s core testimony in Theology of the Old Testament by Walter Brueggemann

For those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Psalm 84 takes us to an interesting moment where this sense of weariness, fragility and vulnerability are transmuted into strength...

The Psalmist calls it the Pilgrims Way.

Going through the balsam valley or the valley of Baca (literally in Hebrew: the place of weeping), we pray that it will become a place of springs, of fresh water.

Science researcher, Brene Brown, tells us that:

“Vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, creativity, and change.”

There is nothing more vulnerable than creativity. . . It's not about winning, it's not about losing, it's about showing up and being seen. There is no creativity without failure.

“The valley of Baca - a place of Springs”

And this complexity is held together similarly in our gospel reading.

Simeon greets Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus, in the second Temple in Jerusalem. It has been over 500 years since Jerusalem's rebuilding. Yet some Jewish scholars write that the people never quite felt like the exile was over. Jerusalem never seemed to flourish like it did before the Babylonian Exile.

And now they were under Roman rule.

The Jewish elder Simeon has been waiting, living just to see One who would embody Christ. A light of a new way...

- No longer divisions
- No longer the Jewish Nation versus the Gentiles as their enemies.

He visions the birthing of a non-dualistic way. But not without sorrow. Not without death.

What would it really be like for us to see all perspectives and not to judge, but to include the other?

This is a paradox that Jesus did very well.

Simeon describes the path that Jesus took – to break out of the binary, the dualistic way of thinking light vs darkness, right vs wrong, black vs white.

Friends our world is complex and it calls for a faith that can respond to this complexity.

We need to find a way, in spite of our human nature that seeks to create identities that build boundaries for inclusion. We need to find the third way.

When we hold on to our identities too tightly... we create binary opposites, competition, us versus them.

Christian vs Non Christian
Canadian vs American
Gay vs Straight
Conservative vs Liberal

The sword that would pierce Mary's soul – was Jesus' death.

The death of a scapegoat.

One who refused to defend a way, but instead provides this third way – a way of love and forgiveness.

The unifying entity in a non-dual reality is **always and only** love.

How do we as Christians become community of love, as a group of very different people?
How do we break out of dualism, of my way vs your way...

It is very uncomfortable when we sit in tension with each other, two opposing ideas on the table. To wait, to believe that love offers a third path.

I believe personally that it is only humility, awareness, vulnerability and a good sense of humour that can lead us in this direction.

Saying words like:

“Oops, I made a mistake”

“I am aware of my racist tendencies... I am seeking another way”

“I used to believe this... and now I believe this... who knows what tomorrow will bring...”

“I am not sure what we need to do next, lets continue the conversation and see where it leads”

https://omny.fm/shows/on-the-way/on-the-way-episode-2-dom-fay-peter-catt-and-richar?in_playlist=on-the-way!podcast

And so it is that a Jesuit Priest can be in peer relationships with men and women whose lives began with trauma and who learn from a young age how to pull the trigger of a gun.
Where friendships are built and conversations mutually inspire.

Where there is no us & them, in & out, my way versus your way.

We too are offered a way out of rivalry and competition.

Where we can look at our neighbours and see fellow pilgrims on the way.

If we indeed will stand on one solid foundation. The foundations of the earth.
The cosmic Christ – who provides a way, a truth and a light for everyone.

**Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?**

Amen
