

Healing Crisis with Love

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Luke 4: 31-44
Walker

Russell Mitchell-

The Open Books, Open Minds, Open Hearts study group at Eastside has been reading and reflecting on Brian McLaren's book Life after Doom. It does not sound like a very inspiring title because who wants to read a book about Doom? The subtitle is: *Wisdom and Courage for a World Falling Apart*. A little more hopeful and it is actually a very good book even though it deals with very difficult realities that are facing our world. In the second chapter, he outlines them:

Our global civilization as currently structured is unstable and unsustainable. Ecologically, our civilization sucks out too many of the Earth's resources for the Earth to replenish, and it pumps out too much waste for the Earth to detoxify. Economically, our civilization's financial systems are complex, interconnected, fragile, and deeply dependent on continual economic growth. Without continual economic growth, financial systems will stumble toward collapse. But with economic growth, we intensify and hasten ecological collapse. In addition, our global economic systems distribute more and more money and power to those who already have it, creating a small network of elites who live in luxury and share great political power, while billions live in or near poverty with little political power. Speaking of politics, as we face increasing ecological and economic instability, social unrest and conflict will also increase. As a result, our democratic political systems will be strained to or past the breaking point. Like a person of my age (Brian is in his 70's) who transitions from stability and health to sickness and decline, our civilization will become weaker and more expensive to maintain.

It is a very bleak picture. It can feel like we are on the edge of a precipice where we will fall or be thrown off. We might wonder what we can or are to do.

In the passage just before our scripture reading today, Jesus found himself on the edge of a precipice, a cliff, with the people from his hometown, ready to throw him over, because of the message he brought to them, declared, and inferred that they have not been living out this message. A message from Isaiah of preaching good news to the poor, giving sight to the blind, releasing the captives, letting the oppressed go free, and declaring the year of God's favour. What does Jesus do when faced with being thrown over a cliff? He calmly walked away and went to another place to begin the ministry he just proclaimed, healing with love, compassion, and authority, and preaching the good news to the people, by living it out. The people were astonished at the way Jesus spoke and acted with authority. Usually, Rabbis would identify who taught them, which was where they got their authority from, who got it from another Rabbi, and down the line to Moses who received the message from God. But Jesus did not identify any other teacher, only himself and God. The spirits or demons he was casting out in this story knew this and named him as Son of God, and the Holy one of God.

This passage today is largely about healing. Jesus healed those with demons, often understood these days to be people with mental illnesses that they didn't understand at the time. Jesus healed one of the disciples' mothers-in-law. A side note here, there often seems to be a belief or assumption that Jesus and his disciples were not married but there are a few times, like in this passage, where there is a reference to a mother-in-law. The disciples would have been married, and the wives were likely traveling with them and helping serve and support the community. After healing Simon's Mother-in-law, at the end of the day, many others came to be healed, and Jesus took time to be with them and heal them. Healing was an important part of Jesus' ministry. What kind of healing is needed today for us, for our world on the brink of collapse?

Israel and Palestine are in a challenging state of war, challenge, and potential collapse. Is there any hope? Karoline Lewis, of the Working

Preacher commentary, tells a story of hope from a trip she was a part of to Palestine and Israel. The group she travelled with

“had a presentation by the Parent’s Circle, a grassroots organization for Palestinians and Israelis who have lost loved ones due to the conflict. The representatives who spoke to us were two fathers, a Palestinian and an Israeli, who had both lost daughters because of the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. We had a very honest discussion about the conflict and about life before and after the Separation Wall. “No wall, no matter how high, can stop two kinds of people, one determined suicide bomber and the one determined peacemaker,” said one of the fathers. They each went through their own moments of wondering how life could possibly carry on given the death of their children due to such senseless, mindless fighting. They could have chosen revenge to ease their pain but instead realized that the only way forward was to talk to each other.

In each other, they found the way to carry on because, in their words, “our blood is the same color, our tears are just as bitter.” They found a way to carry on that chose peace instead of revenge, conversation instead of fear, life instead of death because “it is not our destiny to kill each other in this Holy Land.” At stake for both fathers was peace. Simple as that. This is the gospel. This is love.”

Love is an essential response to war, violence, hate, selfishness, all of which can lead to collapse. It is healing. Jesus showed this over and over. When he reads that we are to preach Good News to the poor, we might often think that means preaching the gospel, with the goal of converting them or getting them to come to church. However, in the work that I do with the houseless at the Queen City Wellness Pharmacy, I believe what is most important, what is preaching good news, is living the gospel – accepting people as they are, for who they are, showing them that they are loved and blessed by God. This is Good News!

So when we think about the potential collapse of civilization, it can be distressing and deeply concerning. However, when Jesus was faced with crisis, he responded with love. This is a message for us as well and I have found is also the message in the book *Life After Doom*. That regardless of what happens, what crisis we may find ourselves in, the most important thing is to respond with love. Not by hoarding or getting a weapon to protect yourself and your property, or by building a bunker so only you and your family can survive. But to realize we are in this together and we need each other. That we will need to share our resources, be loving and compassionate with one another, and live out the gospel message of love and justice, of healing and compassion. That is a much better way to approach the precipice, than by violence, defence, and protectionism.

When Jesus was faced with the crowd prepared to throw him over a cliff, he calmly walked away and carried on his ministry of love and healing. May we be able to face crisis with same kind of calm, loving compassion, and generosity, knowing that we are loved and accepted as we are, and that we are not alone. God is with us. Thanks be to God.