

*Accept, O Lord, our sacrifice ...
 Whereby we offer you
 Our selves, our souls and bodies
 (Rite I, BCP 342)*

I have always found this prayer from Rite I to be deeply meaningful, because it sums up so well our path as disciples of Jesus. But when we make this offering of ourselves, what kind of self are we talking about? How do we integrate ALL the parts of our lives: the psychological, the spiritual, and the physical? What does it mean to offer them for the sake of the Gospel and the life of the world? This prayer is especially meaningful today, because the scriptures we have heard speak so frankly about the struggles of a life of faith. And these scriptures plainly bring up the unspoken question that accompanies ANY good deed, any offering of self: WHY BOTHER?

Why bother? Perhaps we are like the prophet Jeremiah, who bothered to speak and live for justice, only to be misunderstood, maligned and hounded. But Jeremiah knew that a passion for justice cannot be silenced. It comes from deep within our bones and maybe even from God whose passion is to make justice real in time and space. Jeremiah knew this passion to be irresistible. He says, "Lord, you have enticed me and I was ... overpowered... there is something like a BURNING FIRE shut up in my bones." (Jer. 20) And so, maybe we might bother because, like Jeremiah, we have a PASSION for it.

Why bother? Perhaps we are like Paul, who reminded the Romans that actions have ripple effects; Paul, who believed with all his heart, that the ripple effects of RIGHT ACTION are ultimately stronger than evil ones. He gave his life for the proposition that just as ONE person's selfish deed affects us all, so too one person's generous deed affects us all. Christ's generous, self-giving had an ETERNAL effect, infinitely more powerful than the selfishness that killed him. Paul knew that power, and the difference that ONE PERSON can make for the life of the world. And so, we might bother because, like Paul, it is a concrete contribution to the wellbeing of others.

Why bother? Perhaps we are like Matthew, who bothered to do the right thing because THAT is what it means to follow Christ. Now THAT may sound very pious and abstract – but the examples Matthew uses in today’s Gospel are ANYTHING but pious or abstract. They describe, with excruciating honesty, the possible costs of doing the right thing. And they are horrible indeed! In a world filled with selfish deeds, those who advocate for justice, and those who offer compassion, may be maligned, denounced, jailed, or even killed. But believe it or not, this tenth chapter of Matthew is NOT about the COSTS of discipleship. It is actually a CALL TO discipleship. Now I don’t know about you, but if THIS is a call for VOLUNTEERS, I think Matthew needs to see a PR consultant! Well, at least he is honest about the risks. And so maybe some of us bother because, like Matthew, we want to keep our promises, particularly our commitment to follow Jesus.

Now, while this chapter of Matthew as a whole is a call to discipleship, THIS particular portion is actually a CHARGE, and it is given to those who are ALREADY disciples. And the charge that comes from the lips of Jesus, REPEATEDLY, is this: DO NOT BE AFRAID ... DO NOT WORRY ... HAVE NO FEAR. THAT is the charge Jesus gives us: live a just life, a compassionate life, and live it WITHOUT FEAR. Live a life with all the integrity of your WHOLE SELF, soul and body. Offer yourself with all the passion, practicality and commitment your body and soul can muster.

How the followers of Jesus live their lives, is central to Matthew’s Gospel. But curiously, he does not use the common Greek word for life, *ZOE*; which means biological life. Here, Matthew uses the word *PSYCHE*, which means *life-force*. IT is the most unique, most individual, most personal part of you. It is the unique breath that God breathed into you at your birth. It is the ‘you’ inside of you. It is the creativity and vitality you were PERSONALLY given to live your life. And when THIS creative, vital breath is withdrawn, our life here ends. In the meantime, God continues to give us that life force. Of course, we are responsible for the ways we use our creativity and vitality. But Matthew’s insight comes at the end of this 10th chapter, when Jesus says: “*Those who lose their life for my sake will find it.*” (Matt 10: 38-39) That is to say, those who give of their own personal creativity and vitality, their *psyche*, for the life of the

world: THEY WILL FIND THEMSELVES. Put a different way: if you want to really know yourself, then FIND SOMETHING WORTH SACRIFICING FOR!

And so, the charge Jesus gives his disciples, *DO NOT BE AFRAID*, is also the one he gives to us. Do not be afraid to embrace your life with all of its creativity and vitality; but remember you will not find it by keeping it to yourself. FEARLESSNESS is the place creativity and vitality flourish. Fear does not create justice OR compassion. Fear PREVENTS us from finding and offering ourselves, our souls and bodies. That is why Jesus reminds us that our life-force, our personal vitality, comes from God and goes to God. NO ONE else has authority over that. We are uniquely, personally and completely God's own life-breath, and THAT is why we need not fear to extend ourselves, in our integrity, and on behalf of justice. We can name and own proudly every place that grace has touched us. There is no need to hide those points of strength and healing that are uniquely ours. That is why Jesus tells us never to be ashamed of grace.

Fear, love and sacrifice, are always at work in our lives, and they are always personal, NEVER generic. But the question, WHY BOTHER, is related to our ability to name and own the passionate breath of God in our lives. Will we declare or deny that creative vitality? Will we declare or deny the life-force that wants to extend itself, to breathe compassion and justice into the world around us? You see, whether for passion, reason, or duty, the question, WHY BOTHER, is ultimately this: WHAT WILL YOU GIVE YOUR LIFE FOR?

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