

THOUGHTS FROM MY LAPTOP

This past Sunday in the sermon, I suggested four little New Years resolutions or four little things we can do to help us connect more closely with God.

Each of them comes from studying Jesus and the things that mattered to him, and are based on the observations of a pastoral theologian named Dr. Robert Wicks in his book, *Touching the Holy*.

1. Take time to love Gods world. At least three times a day, notice something and savour it: a flower, a sunset, the crisp whiteness of a new snow fall – or another human being. The innocent beauty of a baby; or an elderly person-- let their wrinkles speak to you of the triumph of human spirit. Or if it is someone getting about town in a wheelchair, marvel at their ability to seize hold of life and live it courageously in spite of their limitations. Because limitations are something we all have. When we do this as a daily practice, Wicks says, you will find yourself “falling in love with God’s world all over again”.

And I suspect--- because it has happened to me -- joy will bubble up inside of you and so will the childlike quality of wonder. This is an important thing for us to do because wonder and awe are the wellspring of worship and praise and love for God and his world.

2. Don’t run from your sorrows. Instead face them prayerfully and courageously the way Jesus did. I suggested two examples: the Garden of Gethsemane, and the agony of the Cross. In other words, allow pain to be pain, and learn from it. The way of the world is to deny or avoid our pain or suffering: to sedate or escape our grief through drugs or some other escape. But Jesus teaches differently, and when we follow his way, his Spirit leads us through the valley of the shadow of death, as in Psalm 23, to victory -- to Christian virtue -- to true character development.

3. Risk being creative. As Master Eckhart said – “*we are heirs of the fearful creative power of God.*” So take time to play -- plant a flower -- whistle a tune -- write a poem --work on a craft -- dream a dream. Exercise your God given creativity. Let it spring from the things you have noticed and loved in God’s world, or let it spring from your struggle to come to terms with the suffering side of life. The shadow side of life has been the source of creativity for many a great artist. Beethoven’s Ode to Joy, for example, came out of a combination of his own personal experience with suffering, and his deep appreciation for the world and its beauty. When we are being creative we are expressing our true nature as God’s children.

4. Be compassionate. Jesus responded to the suffering of the world, with compassion. Therefore, compassion should be our response as well. However, in my own personal experience compassion isn’t something we can force. Rather, it is something that comes to us the more we ponder God’s purpose for our lives. When we allow ourselves to enter our own realm of darkness, or to face our own sorrows and sufferings, our hearts are carved, as it were, with grooves of anguish and pain, and these grooves become reservoirs for God to fill repeatedly with compassion. It is easier to face in others what we have learned to face in ourselves.

Four little things, simple yet so powerful, in helping us connect with God more deeply and truly, and thus become more Christ-like in the coming year.

In closing, here is a little New Years Prayer:

May God make your year a happy one! Not by shielding you from all sorrows and pain, But by strengthening you to bear it, as it comes; Not by making your path easy, But by making you sturdy to travel any path; Not by taking hardships from you, But by taking fear from your heart; Not by granting you unbroken sunshine, But by keeping your face bright, even in the shadows; Not by making your life always pleasant, But by showing you when people and their causes need you most, and by making you anxious to be there to help. God’s love, peace, hopes and joy to you for the year ahead. (Anonymous)

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