

To Be Faithful

I was with Parker Palmer, one of my wisdom heroes, a few years ago and he invited me and some other young leaders to imagine what it would be like to sit bedside next to a movement maker that we think really attempted to make a difference in the world. I'd like to invite you to do the same. Who is someone that you believe made a significant positive change in the world? Now, imagine that you get to have a conversation with that person as they are preparing to die. What would you want to talk to them about? What do you think they would want to talk about? Now, you ask them, "You've done so much to move your cause forward, would you say you've accomplished everything that needs to be done for your cause in your lifetime?"

What do you envision their response would be?

This is what Palmer calls the tragic gap. A reality that all the great movement makers of history have had to live and die with—including Jesus. That even when someone I can spend a lifetime being extremely effective in their work and calling; at the end of a lifetime of effort, the work will not be done. And it is not only tragic because it's sad, but tragic because it will always be there. Jesus speaks of the tragic gap to his disciples in the Gospel of John when he explains that even after he dies even greater things will need to be done to bring about the kingdom (kingdom) of God (Jn 14:12).

What great movement makers can teach us is how to live in the tragic gap. The reality is that until all suffering has been extinguished and every tear has been wiped away broken heartedness will be with us. Broken-heartedness that the world is not as we dream it to be. The great challenge is how to live broken-hearted in a way where our hearts don't break open in spite of the suffering and loss, but because of it. In this way our hearts are able to break open rather than break apart.

How can we live and even thrive with a broken but open heart? Palmer says it's in faithfulness and connection to the genuine. Perhaps the person you asked the tragic gap question to can help you with a detailed response. What were they faithful too? What was truly genuine to them?

A quote from Rev. Victoria Safford explains this all so well:

"Our mission is to plant ourselves at the gates of hope — not the prudent gates of Optimism, which are somewhat narrower; nor the stalwart, boring gates of Common Sense; nor the strident gates of self-righteousness ... nor the cheerful, flimsy garden gate of 'Everything is gonna be all right,' but a very different, sometimes very lonely place, the place of truth-telling, about your own soul first of all and its condition, the place of resistance and defiance, the piece of ground from which you see the world both as it is and as it could be, as it might be, as it will be; the place from which you glimpse not only struggle but joy in the struggle — and we stand there, beckoning and calling, telling people what we are seeing, asking people what they see."

I'd like to close with a blessing for me and for you:

May we remember to not try to fix it all.

May we find a place to abide in the tragic gap between the way things are and the way they could be.

May we be faithful

Clinging to what is Genuine with broken yet open hearts so we may continue the very good and very hard work of helping to bring God's kindom (kingdom) come.

Amen.

Rev. Anders Peterson

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