

*"Opening Your Heart
Is Carrying Your Cross"*

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Gospel of Thomas Sayings #49, #58;
Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Mark 8:38-38
February 21, 2021

Please bring to worship: 6 strips of paper and a container or clip in which to keep them throughout Lent and Easter.

So, the question is: Can we live creating possibility? Can we live "as if", "even though?" Will I live what I believe knowing I have everything already within me? ...do I even believe that?

It's a tough world out there. There are huge divides, false divisions and dichotomies. We live at time that pressures us into extremes which invite no self-reflection or nuance: democrat or republican, racist or anti-racist, teachers/families, socialism for the rich/socialism for the poor, child/adult.

What do I believe?

We don't and the world doesn't grow when our efforts center on convincing ourselves or others by being a logic bully...about faith or anything else, for that matter. Bullying doesn't convince...it denigrates through fear and intimidation. Rather, growth happens when we come alongside to understand needs and motivations...our own and that of others and then reflect that back. ...like holding up a mirror so we can see our own thoughts or they theirs...more clearly.

And, you won't be successful if doing this as a way to manipulate to get the predetermined outcome you want. It must come from a genuine desire to understand motivations and deeply listening to help each other assess and appreciate intentions and goals...rather than change them...it's not a discussion. Maybe in so doing, a re-evaluating of a chosen means to chosen end/goal happens.

Start by focusing on yourself: Ask yourself how your preferred approach might work in practice vs as you assume. Play it out looking for complexities.

With others: Well, first you have to be with others...reminds me of Pat sharing about the Trump supporters that shoveled out a Democrat's driveway without expectation and left her confused and us asking, "Is this all it takes to begin something new?"

In coming along side someone in a caring, thoughtful way: Hear them into speech listening to understand rather than respond. Rather than try to convince them of anything or ask them why, ask them to play out their approach to demonstrate how that would work. Let them discover complexities or wrinkles in their thinking. Then, as they see for themselves, they may adjust those means to their desired end.

It comes down to putting on your oxygen mask first before helping others. Understanding yourself first, so you can live "as if."

So you can honestly say “Even though... I believe... and so I choose to act according to my faith and not the circumstance.

It is not my job/role to change others, it's my job to look at myself and change, save me...putting things in the right order. I will live my life forward. I will live an ‘As If Life’ now!” For the new realm is here! I will create possibility.

It comes down to understanding myself. It comes down to understanding someone vs changing someone. The rest is up to them. And it necessitates m being humble...letting go of my own fear and guilt enough so...I can think.

So how to then how to bring possibility? Again, not by logic bullying disguised as discussion. Not by making someone feel bad about themselves or have to defend themselves. Not when what you are questioning is connected to the fabric of the other's identity, lodged in community, friendships, and faith. More on this next week...

Prompting:

I use to hate that phrase, “Pick up your cross and follow me.”

But now, a more mature me with a teachable opening heart...one that's actually let go of some old things and learned a few new things over the years, now...

I understand the only way my life is going to change *is if* I own my shadow and walk into the light. ...change only if I live “As If” making possibility in each moment...which is predicated on my willingness to pick myself up, stop obsessing with the what if's... and live “even though”.

Living “As If” means picking up my cross. My truth.
Turning myself around to get in line behind Jesus...
align with the ways of Jesus. Put things in my life in the right order.

That's what Jesus said to Peter, right? Get thee behind me?

Just like Peter, I may not like hearing truth, the facts...
as if denying the facts will make them go away.

But in denying the facts, I am closing down the present moment.
I have a choice to make based upon what I really believe.

So here it is: I do believe God/Divine Life-giving Energy of the Universe cares deeply for me....and you. And that means walking the talk with Him to and through Jerusalem...my own

Jerusalem...

darn that heavy cross!

I don't want to deny the facts...to drown in the "what if's"...
it's just that life is very hard sometimes.
Figuring out how to live "As If" is not easy.

For Jesus and for each of us it isn't an easy journey...the journey toward true and meaningful life...

a life with core integrity, self-respect, truth, joy, compassion.
Not being swayed by or surrendering to the "what if's."

The journey isn't easy.

There may be some real suffering for there will be some inner (and, for a few, some actual) dying to old ways and allegiances.

I can turn up...or turn off those inner voices vying to dictate choices. Voices from the secular culture or even old experiences wanting to block my way. Almost holding me hostage from my better self.

It is a fact!

The only way life is ever going to change is if I change it.

I have to do something about my life...*you have to pick up your cross.*

Jesus implores Peter to see the bigger picture and take the longer view of things...He implores him...implores us...

to face the faith, not just the facts. Be newly named.

Focus on divine possibility and not on human, short term struggles and outcomes. Jesus knows our struggles.

Jesus knows. He, himself, for 40 days and then everyday...

went out into the darkness and put his hand into the hand of God.

This shall be better than a light and safer than a known way.

Jesus implores us, just as God implores Abraham and Sarah, to believe, to live the covenant...despite our doubts, fears and culture's waves of insistence on a false reality.

Jesus implores us: understand laws don't create justice, people do.

Claim your power.

And you know what? We hear this and do this: those inner voices quiet.

I can hear myself think.

Those who save their lives...by just keeping on living their lives in the same old ways...will lose their lives.

Nothing is going to change for them. No logic will change them.

Those who lose their life...who go beyond complaining and blaming and stop living their lives the way they've always lived them...

they will find new life.

“Blessed are the solitary and chosen ones, for you will find the realm, for you are from it and will return there.”

“Blessed is the one who is disturbed by her discovery. That one has found life.”

You already know this. You were born knowing this and each of us has spent a life-time trying to forget it!

Jesus rebuked Peter when Peter would not accept truth: see things as they are, take the long view, live “as if” the realm were at hand.

Perhaps Peter wanted a king, not a messiah to show us how to put things back in the right order...

at some level, we all still want a king to come and right what is wrong ...save us.

Jesus does come to save, us, but not so much from the world as from ourselves... rebuking Peter, Jesus says to him/to us not to set our minds on human things but rather on divine...

Jesus says to those who have gathered around him...as we have gathered...**deny yourself (save yourself from the ways of the world)**

...look up...look to the bigger picture, divine outcomes...

it will be hard but it's the only way through to lasting peace.

Pick up your cross and follow me.

Many scholars believe it is not so much our individual crosses Jesus refers to here, but how it will take all of us, each of us, to carry the cross Jesus bears...**it takes a community to raise...a cross.**

The cross...a symbol of ultimate justice, integrity, relationship with God palpable in our daily relationships with each other.

We may scrape some knees and bruise some ego as we falter and even fall, but, together we get back up again truly alive.

Hey, you know that cross you usually carry around, is it about justice and integrity? **Or, is that actually a big chip on your shoulder?**

Darn! Jesus reminds us what we deeply know to be true:

To really be alive, you are called to live “As If” the new realm is at hand.

Pick up the cross...face the facts. Perhaps picking up your cross is synonymous with keeping your heart wide open.

And you may indeed get nailed...lose things deemed important by the culture at large.

In that way, the culture would say you are dead, a failure. Drown you out.

Nail you for what you believe and live.

But here's the thing. God provides a way through!

Truth cannot be stopped; new life always comes forth.

God loves you and what God most deeply desires for you is what you deeply desire for yourself.

And what you most deeply desire for yourself is exactly what most others desire despite the way their fear and non-thinking anxiety closes their hearts and pushes them around like waves... pushes them to faulty means to gain their desired end.

Life can be different. How will you choose to live?
Fight them, fight yourself...
with logic and endless discussions that alienate?

No one's, your...problems can be solved without examining yourself, your fears, and the ramifications of your choices...on you and others.

Hear yourself. Only the right ordering of things will lighten that cross.

This is what some Americans want in their religion...no need to self-examine, look at ramifications, see the bigger picture...cause its hard, thinking kind of work to do.

But, we don't have a feel-good God or a Jacuzzi Jesus...

But, we do got a womb with a view

...a new life where we can see the bigger picture!

The real significance of the cross for us today is that it propels us forward and beyond our own

circular thinking.

It is a sign of encouragement, not discouragement.

It's a prompt that we, too, can take the chance to live "As If"
...make new choices for our lives that will pay off if we take the long view of things...live within the providence of God (God's timing for us.).

This forms us in a new way, opening up the present moment to possibility.

We can make changes within ourselves to communicate love and care for ourselves and for others...play out in our thinking our chosen means to our chosen ends to discover the nuances...
and be disturbed by the discovery. And discover true life.

We don't have to convince anyone of anything...we can't.
All we can do, and it is the most we can do, is live "As If."
It feels risky...maybe scary to think of changing how we be in this world. Gee, who wants to be solitary or disturbed.

But there is something far riskier to us than changing...
not changing our choices!

Something far riskier than being the church today.

Geeze, we know the fate of yesterday's church...fait accompli!
The church we grew up in is dead. Dead. Dead.
Die with it or resurrect and move forward...that's the choice.

As individuals and as community, we pick up our crosses as we extend care to each other and everyone who comes through our doors...no matter what race, gender, sexuality, age, class, ethnicity, health (physical and emotional health), no matter what their life story or life condition.

We pick up our crosses when, taught by our open, teachable hearts,
we live the wisdom of our faith beyond these doors and express our faith not on Sunday mornings, but on all the days we confront the temptation to put ourselves first...or last.

We pick up our cross, when we confront the temptation to hang on to the way the things are even if they are not all that good...

the temptation to keep habits in place, to hide behind old choices and behaviors, to blame others for the way our lives are.

It is out there, in the world, that we are called to be the church,
not in the safety of this service or this building.

Our faith identity is not tied to the name of our denomination or the address of our building, but
to our individual names and the cross we individually and corporately pick up...

a cross which speaks of a love which surpasses human understanding...

a love that stood up for what is right and just in life and stayed the course all the way through
crucifixion to resurrection...

a cross it takes all of us together to carry.

Jesus got nailed for what he believed in and how he lived it.

His kind of love and integrity cannot be stopped by someone's threats, temper tantrums,
conspiracy theories, racism, sexism, genderism, sarcasm, sabotage...not even by death.

You know this is true...here we are 2,000+ years later talking about his love and courage.

Even the smallest action to stop complaining,
stop wrestling with the "What If's" of life...
to pick up your cross and do something about the life you have...
even the smallest new choice lets light shine from your soul.
And you and the world change!

In the church, this narrative is basic:

Jesus loves us...loves you. Jesus knows you.
Holiness gives you everything you need to journey with Him on the Way.
Live "as if."

So, on one of your pieces of paper please fill in this question:
Even though....., I believe..... .

On the other side, please finish this intention:
I choose to life as if..... .

Keep it in a safe place as we journey through Easter.
There is a safe place to land, to live "as if" as your faith
brings you back to solid ground.