

Creating Possibility: Learning to Live "As If!"

"The Rubble Is Worth The Trouble"

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Gospel of Thomas Sayings # 82, #26;

1Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

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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...

Last week we said, you can't open up "possibility" (convince anyone of anything) by making them feel bad about themselves. ...by questioning the fabric of their identity which is lodged in culture, community, friendships, and faith. Think of it this way: it's like they're sitting atop this huge elephant of identity which doesn't change course easily. Each of us is a rider on an elephant of self-identity.

The rider part of you is your conscious verbal reasoning, logical thinking self of which we are often aware. The elephant represents all that has formed our identity (99% of which we are not aware). The elephant is powerful and a lot more formidable than the rider.

So, first of all, if we want to stay on the Way...live "as if" in the realm, we need to know our own elephants first...what is truly guiding our subconscious reactions and affecting how we think and where we will go and won't go!

And, to convince or persuade someone else, speak to their elephant, not the rider...for it is the elephant that has the power to control which direction its rider is going to go. If the elephant likes you, is beginning to hear and trust you, it is more likely it will move in your direction and persuade the rider to go along.

To do this, you need to come close enough to the other riders to know their elephants...by their first names so to speak. But...no discussion, no logic bullying ...listening. Ride alongside. Let our elephants kiss and discover nuances and ramifications and play things out differently in their minds and so, maybe affecting their end destinations! To help do this, maybe try speaking "as if" the world and our God were listening to each word you speak to those elephants. Ah...the art of persuasion.

Let's listen this week to the first half of this video on the art of persuasion (3:41):
<https://youtu.be/24adApYhoyc>

So focus a moment on your own elephant...

What is the mouse...that frightens your elephant? ...so then, the elephant runs away with you? Stampedes? Is your mouse: immigration, voting rights, poverty? Are these the mice that cause your elephant to stampede over your ability to listen to yourself or anyone else?

Remember: our mice are formed by, have a diet of our fears, guilt, and past experience.

BTW, You know, if we ride our elephants all the way to Jerusalem, nose to nose, with a, our elephants gets smaller and the cross you carry gets lighter on the Way...you heart opens wide. (And, I'd rather be trampled by turtles than elephants. That's a music joke!)

Prompting:

As we move through *this* economy and the emerging culture that surrounds it,
everything looks different. Maddening...

But one thing remains the same...or is intensifying.

That would be
the number of conversations I hear where people are expressing their discouragement
and sadness or their anger.

We are indeed an angry group of people...and often not gentle.
Here's the thing.....

We feel the way we do for really good reasons...and there's no such thing as a wrong
feeling...but what we do with the feelings
we have can be life stopping! Detrimental. Destructive.
Backfire on us.

Sadness expressed inwardly with nowhere to go brings depression.
Sadness is expressed outwardly often manifests as anger.
What we do with that anger matters!

*When our sadness turns us to anger, we often find ourselves
in a solitary place with a choice to make:*

how to use the energy that comes from that anger.

Sometimes that sadness...yielding to anger, like for Jesus in today's wisdom teaching, is a "justice" marker along the "way."
It lets us know something isn't right.
...to pay deep attention for we may be nearing the realm.

Jesus in Thomas speaks about being disturbed, in a solitary place,
a fiery place of rebelling against injustice...signs of the realm.
**Jesus said: "Whoever is near me is near the fire,
and whoever is far from me is far from the realm."**

We can take the insights and energy of the anger and use them for *good*...
Feed our rational selves and our elephants a new diet.
You see, we are at a crossroads. We are in the marketplace of life...
where real life daily practice intersects faith's possibilities.

- ~Will we choose to stand back and gawk at the angry people as innocent by-standers shocked by what's going on?
- ~Will we, as part of the system, tolerate the abuse of those who are powerless and have no voice, or unawares or in fear, or with misplaced trust in the system?
- ~Will we look the other way and hope for the best? ...ignoring, and so, taking advantage of those who are trying their best to play by the rules...ones that are stacked against them?

Anger is a secondary emotion...
there's a very important primary feeling beneath our anger;
a reality that we are not giving attention. ...like that elephant.

And so in frustration, the situation we are ignoring explodes us into anger. Often under the anger is deep sadness and sometimes fear.
...like that mouse making our elephant stampede.

Most often we act out of secondary feelings instead of addressing our real feelings and needs.

We talk to the rider instead of listen to the elephant.

And you know what? Sometimes, it seems we just don't get heard *until we get* angry...they don't get it till we're mad!
And even then,
our real needs won't be known and so addressed **unless we name them**...or unless the other person is *clairvoyant*.

- ~So, *when was the* last time you were angry?
- ~What was the sadness, the hurt, just beneath it...a need that was not getting met?
- ~Did anybody but you know?

In last week's lesson, Peter was in denial about his fear of being left on his own with all the same problems and sad at the prospect of losing Jesus and so he angrily rebukes Jesus.

Jesus responds to Peter's sadness, "Get thee behind me, denial and fear and sadness...Peter put things in the right order. Deal with your emotions and face the faith (not the facts) considering long term vs immediate outcomes."

Divine vs Human outcomes...Divine vs Human wisdom.
Corporate long term well-being vs personal immediate gains.

Jesus told Peter to look at what was beneath his anger.
The elephant. Logic is not your best ally in addressing feelings.

In today's Bible Wisdom teaching,
Jesus was so sad, He became angry. The temple leaders and sellers and even the buyers...missed the point, didn't see the bigger picture of how their choices were impacting so many on so many levels. And holding those without resources...down and back.

So, God in Jesus gets angry because God hurts for the people.
You see:

The *point* of religion is not religion...it's God.
And the *point* of God is not religion...it's you! Each of us!

So, because the temple system, despite its "best" intentions, hadn't explored the nuances and ramifications of the chosen means to a desired outcome...and Jesus gets angry.

This story is commonly called "The Cleansing of the Temple" ...but Jesus is not mopping the floors with Pinesol.

He is turning the tables over. Getting totally ticked.

It wasn't that He didn't care about Jewish traditions...it was exactly because He did care that he was so upset!

Jesus saw the Law of God getting lost in the shuffle...laws given to help us live the lives God longs for us to live.

Laws given to help us find inner freedom and outer peace by putting things in the right order. Laws that invite us to self-reflection inviting us to true, emotionally honest lives and aware choices.

This divine guidance had been reduced to common rules and regulations. Creating an in-group and an out-group.

So what was supposed to foster a right relationship between God and humanity, had become just another means of exploitation...

corrupting us monetarily--yes...

but more importantly--side-tracking or bankrupting us spiritually.

They were...*we are*...missing the point.

So bent on doing it right, we're getting it wrong...

we've even forgotten what the "it" is that we're trying to do.

We have become muddled in a mad world, unaware.

That's the point Jesus is making...pay attention to the means you are choosing and the nuances and maybe unintended results!

What are you doing? ...affect you are really having?

Your zeal for my father's house has taken on a whole new, unsavory context

Jesus was upset...angry...because what started out with the best of intentions now had become a hindrance to the poor, the needy...

those who seek to be in the temple where ancient worshipers believed God resides on earth where now there was literally a price to pay. And if you couldn't pay it...well...

The rules were in the way....not God's rules...not the 10 Commandments (so to speak)...

but the unspoken rules.

Then: the right sacrificial animal bought with the right money.

Today: what's acceptable to wear, to say, where to sit, who's in and whose out, interpretations of the Word that exclude.

...the unspoken rules were in the way.

Zeal for worshipping in the right ways had gotten in the way of the true meaning "worship/temple". Excluding people.

Here at Tippe, *you in your life*...do you see your hidden faults and unsavory zeal...which judge and exclude?

So often we riders don't see how, within ourselves, we have set up so many rules trying to justify ourselves to the point we are unaware of where our elephants are trampling or taking us.

We want the Way cleared; choices neatly set out before us without any nuance or unaware of impact on others.

We don't like messes, nuances...rubble...anywhere in our lives ...including church. But ignoring elephants doesn't make them go away!

We so long for order that we lose sight of our real goals...which are indeed very similar to all the others riders' goals even as we sit atop very different elephants.

Jesus makes a point! About sadness, justice, anger.

Take a moment. Let yourself get a picture of him in your holy imagination seeing those poor in the temple trying to meet the requirements of those in power which ignore their needs.

See him upsetting tables, dispersing animals, yelling.

What sounds might you hear from those who gathered there as they watched this "crazy man" at work?

In the background, *if you really listen*, you can also hear God crying for even in our greatest *human wisdom* we are so foolish. The poor, oppressed are God's people too!

In Jesus' *foolish* human actions there is so much Divine wisdom.

Did Jesus' righteous anger make a difference?
Or was it only foolishness?
Wasted energy?

Will we get it?

What difference can it really make if one
righteous person does one profound gesture?
Is that one gesture worth it?

Gee, we can't change *the world* that way...one person and situation at a time, can we?
It will take too long!

Can we change *ourselves* that way? ...one situation at time?
One emotionally honest moment at a time?

What difference could doing "one thing"...
even one righteous, foolish thing...make?

~Each time we say no to even small injustices,
each time we stand up against a daily corruption.....

~Each time we let ourselves feel our real feelings and do something about them...

~Each time we come close enough to someone else to feel their real feelings and listen...

the world changes.

The elephants come a little closer...maybe even close enough to kiss.

Want proof that it changes everything?

The world's resistance to us doing even 1 new thing!

In today's Wisdom Teachings, Jesus is raising the ante...

would turn it all to rubble if "how we're living" keeps
even one person from God, keeps *you from God!*

The church exists so we remember to and explore how to live "As If" in the new realm
of just peace, love, and grace.

The church exists to give people courage to look foolish
in the eyes of the culture...and even our families!

We are the church. You are the church.

We can offer no logic that will bring someone else to live "As If."

But we can live with just enough faith to "be" different...
creating amazing possibility for riders and elephants.

This may mean upsetting things a bit,
doing some rubble rousing!

We are moving from human foolishness
to divine foolishness.

We won't *let* the dust settle.

We won't let the dust settle...yes, at a time when many churches are facing
crunches and worrying about ministry,

let us continue to pivot to devote ourselves to shaking off
the dust from our ministries, off some of our elephants.

We won't let the dust settle...

we are...

disagreeing and listening...staying alongside,

focusing on nuances...on what works,

on the ministry and not personalities, on process and not product,

on our own responsibilities not on what others should do.

Advocacy.

Individual support for healing.

Children engaged.

Opportunities for introspection and education...

information and inspiration.

Anti-racism and cross-cultural explorations and relationships.

The church is a gathering of people atop elephants...finding ways to move along
together along the Way making a difference in our own lives and in the world...
by making real our experience of God in the living of everyday.

Making real God's ways as revealed to us in the incarnation of
God's wisdom known to us as Jesus.

It's a mad world...and it's worth living in!

Raise the tables, the roof, raise up your spirit...don't let the dust settle.

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..... .

Live "as if" as your faith brings you back to solid ground.

Be who you are meant to be!