

LIFE'S GIFT OF FAITH

There is a photograph on the stairway, the one of the baby being born that has struck me. Every morning I stop by and say good morning to that baby. Every morning I say to myself "Well, that's today," or "That's us," or "That's my life." Every once in a while you can hear that baby crying as it is being born. And it struck me, that as life or you come into the world, that the world and yourself are all mixed up, but not for very long. All of a sudden, you discover there is something you can count on. That something is your mother's breast. You can just count on that being there to aid you in life. And you put faith, you put the whole weight of your action on that which you can trust and you have a radical confidence that that will continue.

It is that everydayness of the Faith, the Hope, and the Love that we are talking about. We are not talking about religion. We are not talking about something that belongs to some group of people over here on the edge of life but we are talking about a dynamic that is present for every human being, bar none, from the beginning of life to the end of life. We are talking about the Faith and the Hope and the Love which are present in the world and the gift of every one. We're talking about that which is given with life. These lectures will use the classical categories: Faith, and Hope and Love. These categories are the frame of the lectures but the really important thing is that we grasp that profound gift that is the possibility of life itself. When I talk about the fact that I showed up trusting my mother's breast I am talking about the kind of given confidence that everyone has when they come to the world. But finally it is not about that; it is about something that is not other than that, in one sense, but is the profundity, the profoundness of consciousness that happens exactly at the point when that simple faith goes away.

For every person counts on something, every culture counts on something that is their belief. They count on something, that is the world's gift. You count on the stability of the images of life that you were born with because they are just there; you trust your life to them. That's not naughty. That's the glue of society that you have the kind of fabric where something can be trusted. But all of a sudden, in the midst of that trust which sustains your life, wham, something happens! My mother isn't there anymore. Every one puts his trust and acts this out by putting his weight on something. You trust the sustaining values: honesty is the best policy; you trust the values of the society. You trust the preserving system that you have grown up with. You just trust that and act on the basis that those values will be there. You move out and act and wham--something happens! One builds the future on the stability of history, on the stability of one's community, on the stability of everything that has gone before and envisions the future that will be like the past. One even trusts life and death. One trusts the kind of paradoxical enigma of life that you came into the world and that you're going to go out of the world and wham--something happens.

Sometimes something happens and you don't know how to word it. That something happening is the time when life assaults the meaning of your existence. It assaults your values. I recall a time in the life of the movement when we made a shift from The Local Church to the Primal Community Experiment. I remember hearing about one place where a whole Galaxy went into radical despair and someone

said "I thought we could trust the movement" and literally broke down in tears. That kind of assault of your life's sustaining images comes when you discover that you thought you could put your confidence in the stability of nations and fourteen national governments go down the drain in a few months. You know, people who thought they could trust the earth's being flat and they put their confidence into the earth being flat and Wham, something happened! There is an entire shake-up of your head when that alien image comes in, just foreign to everything that you have ever counted on being what life is about. It breaks down, it is not there anymore. And the images that assault the 20th Century scientific revolution; when I took science I knew I could trust that nature abhorred the vacuum. I thought I could trust that the laws of physics that were applicable within the atmosphere of the earth as eternal truths and wham! They collapsed. Even up to a year or two ago I thought that I could trust that there wasn't anything, that the final reality was the stability of life, wham! We get new scientific investigations that raise the question of the stability of even that. All of the images that sustain my life begin to collapse. Or should we talk about the images that freighted a nation? We find a Watergate--wham! We run into the ethics of hard government. Wham! Something just gets shaken up. We worry about the images of the use of national flags as patches on the backs of blue jeans. That is not the problem. The question or the situation is that the images that were powerful images to sustain our being have collapsed and caused the national flag to appear on blue jeans. This alien image comes in and attacks. That is the only way I know how to talk about it--as an attack. The way it comes to me, it is even hard to talk about. The only way to talk about it is under the rubric of getting distance on it. But those things come as powerful attacks on everything that you thought you had learned about life. You thought you knew something about maintaining of relationships, you thought you understood mankind, and somewhere in the early days along comes Sigmund Freud and wham! A whole new understanding and self-consciousness bursts into being, and I am thrown into a whirl of not understanding what life is all about.

This kind of external happening that has happened in our times and happens in other times in history has often been talked about as the Dark Night of the Soul. There is an interesting phenomenon here. One of the experiences that we were struggling with was the Dark Night of the Soul. Now the Dark Night of the Soul is that event or that time when all of those images that sustained who I was, that sustained all my relationships, are just gone. Darkness has taken over. It's as if I was living in a room and I was looking out on the scene of life and all of a sudden somebody, from whence I know not, pulled down all the shades and I lose track of my directions. I run to the mirror to see who I am and it is so dark I can't see who I am in the mirror. I get out my photographs to try to trace my history and it is so dark I can't read the photograph. I can't see where I am or who I am in the midst of that situation.

There is a sense of profound humiliation. I, forty-two years old, thought I understood life, am utterly humiliated that I do not know what life is all about. I do not understand it anymore. I am totally uprooted. Every image of what it meant to be male has been crashed down. Every image of family, and every image of society that gave me some kind of footage in life suddenly is not there and I am left in the darkness, in the shaded room of not knowing. I am left sensing not the futility, but humiliation. There is no identity I can grasp on to. It's interesting how this gets expressed in popular songs these days. Listen to this one.

Well, I'm New York born and raised
But nowadays I'm lost between two shores.
L.A.'s fine but it ain't home.
New York's home but it's not mine no more

(Listen to the sense of blindedness that comes when that dark night of the collapse of all images comes upon you.)

I've looked at life from both sides now,
From win or lose and still, somehow,
It's life's illusions I recall.
I really don't know life at all.

I really don't know life at all and I am utterly, powerfully aware of my finitude. I am aware of being the one who is just four score year and ten; the one who will end by being shoved into the refrigerator in the mortician's joint. Humiliation takes over. The strange kind of experience in that dark night is the utter awareness that finally there is nothing that I can believe in anymore, and I discover myself as not a believer. Not a believer.

But the strange thing is that I believe in nothing. What men and women do perhaps in history, believe in something. I believe in nothing. I thought I believed in the images of the Historical Church, I thought I believed in my society. All have collapsed and I believe in nothing. Not a philosophical nothing; not the nihilistic nothing, but here is nothing that I believe in. I thought I knew life and it's on the other side, it's in the midst of that that I discovered, well, I had to ask myself a question. Why don't you just give up? Why don't you just lie down and die? Well, because I believe in nothing. It's not as if I had done something; it's almost as if I woke up in the midst of that darkness believing in nothing. And it was like the first dawn. Oh mind you the darkness was still there. The darkness was still there and the darkness does not go away. But I believe. And you ask me, "Well, how did this happen?" I say, "The Mystery." "And what do you believe in?" I say, "Nothing." I know that no images of society, or family freight the final meaning of my existence. And that darkness will never go away. I am returned to life and in the midst of life I live in that dark night.

Have you ever gone into the Tunnel of Love? They always call it the Tunnel of Love, I always thought it was the Tunnel of Horror. You go into the Tunnel of Love but you always go into the tunnel with the sure knowledge that, because you saw the boats come out the other end that you would come out, and that was the only reason you went in. You went into this Tunnel of Love, but the boats don't come out. You are in the dark night for the rest of your life. I remember going into one of these Tunnels of Love once when I was a kid. My mother and I went in. I was afraid to go alone. You know there's darkness and then there's a little scene over on the side. Every once in a while there's a scene. I recall that in front of us there was a kid and his mother. And the kid said "Ah, look at that. That's real over there!" and the mother said, "That's right." That was terrible. I suffered. I said "It isn't real," but he didn't know. Even as a kid I was suffering, my profound awareness that that was not real and the suffering

that he did not know that. The suffering of being the profound believer is not your interior suffering of a little agony and despair of a little darkness. It is the suffering for the world that does not know the glory of living the profound self-consciousness of living the believing gone before nothing. So in the tunnel you return to the realities of life at the same time knowing that this too will pass away. This too will finish. This too is a scene along the side of the tunnel of the Dark Night of the Soul. They are all momentary.

I want to come at this another way. In terms of the fact that you count on things, you trust being, when you become that believing one. There are three ways of looking at Faith beyond Faith. In the trusting one, the thing that's happened to you when that something happens, is your integrity is pardoned. Foreign values enter your life. The values of a whole world become impinged upon, and the ethic that makes them drop out of being. The whole panorama of a globe comes before you and making a decision before this or that little peripheral thing in your life now becomes a hoax. You experience yourself as one who is the freedom, utterly weak. When you are a lawyer, and the meaning of your life is being a lawyer, you could handle your life. You could have vocational integrity. But when the alien image comes and foreign values, it is like a wham. I cannot go on. How can I go on with this kind of situation? When that kind of darkness comes your first response is something like "I don't have any basis for caring anymore, or, put more simply, "I don't know how to help. I just don't know how to help anymore." You feel like a pile of Jello that has been set out for too long and there is nothing you seem to be able to do. The values go away and the values come and you discover "there aren't any values I can trust!" But few people understand Profound Consciousness. There aren't any values I can trust. You ask the question "Why should I go on asking?" You wake up the next morning and you discover that you are propelled into care and action in life in the midst of the darkness of knowing that all values come and go and that you no longer can put your weight down on any single value of any single problem. What a great day when you discover you can't trust the Movement. Then, not as if you decide to act, and this is poetry I suppose, it's as if you were entrusted as the believing one to act. Or the great profound givenness to your life is that life has no assurances and you will return to acting out and molding out meaning where no meaning is. Knowing that the suffering is everyone around you is putting final confidence in those meanings and your pain and suffering is "Oh my God, could they but know that the gift of life is even this too shall pass away and that life is moved in the midst of creation." And therefore you return trusting as the one who trusts beyond trust in any of the things of this passing moment.

And then, the certitude of life, the confidence that this can be trusted. It comes to you first as the future is the responsibility of your being. You remember when you trusted the future, don't you remember that? When I was growing up we never even ever thought we would run out of anything on this earth. I mean we may not have had it at home but you knew where you could get it. Now the future imposes. That has taken away confidence. The dinosaurs are finally quitting and the temperature of the world has dropped one degree in the last three years. And today you would be glad if it would drop another degree. But it wiped out thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands of tons of food--for the people. I can not have confidence. Where is my certitude if it isn't in the future? Where does status quo prevail? Where do I have clarity on the vision? Now I have gotten foggy. That Heilbronner paper about the future of the world scares you. And it

doesn't help to say everything will work out all right, it won't, and you know he's right. And yet in the midst of that you know that is no answer. You discover that you are blinded and the future is not in your hands. But right in the midst of that you discover you wake up the next morning as caring and it's not as if you wanted to. It's as if it was just given to you. Not that I trust the future. Not that I think everything will work out. I don't know how you say this except in poetry. It's as if it were a gift to me that I believe. That I believe in what? That I believe in nothing. I trust nobody. The future is out of my hands. I believe the future. I do not believe in XYZ. I just believe. I wake up as one who discovers that he believes. Maybe it is only in the context of hope that one could even say that. But the Faith beyond and against Faith is not a gift of a little group on the side. It is the gift of everyone who self-consciously stands present to life as a gift to him. I suppose you are finally reduced to poetry. So let me read just one more poem.

Lifted out of the death throes by the unmerciful power of life
I raise my head to view anew the reality given
The pangs of birth are both the mystery's and mine
And are unceasing
Born again and again and yet again
Each birth requiring more labor than the one before
Yet restless to be born again
But knowing how the labor comes I shudder with the pain of it
Each new urge to birth is from the womb which was my former life
Was the last self not enough?
The eternal mother of my being yearns again
To heave forth the burden of her fruitful womb
And I am thrust once more into the awesome response to life
Knowing this too will be but a cradle for tomorrow.

--Justin Morrill

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