

Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

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House Church Witness

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It has become increasingly clear to me that this community has a radical destiny in the history of civilization. Hearing that international report the other day, I was tremored because it was clear that there is a great vacuum across the face of our globe relative to vision, relative to methods, relative to comprehensive images, that are necessary to our present time. And it's like wherever we are, wherever we go, our life is taken from us.

We are a people of destiny. And yet underneath that, the question is stirred in my mind just what is at the root of our destiny? And I'm forced back to this last week. It was an awful week, I mean it was not that anything tragic happened, or that great demands were made upon you, it was just an awful week. We were on this fast. And it was not my suggestion. I went into it rather unwillingly but nevertheless decided to be corporate. And what appeared during the week was a rather intense irritation. I mean, it's like you're nervous all the time. And you get sharp with your colleagues. And you can bite their head off or kill them in a moments notice, without even half thinking. That's why it was such a terrible week. Not because I was irritated, but because of what happened to me in my irritation.

My good wife here was one of the brunts of a particular event of irritation. And you know, after that event--and there were others--with others, as well as with her, it was that you found yourself justifying your irritation. You found yourself spinning great stories about why you should be irritated. You found yourself angry at the one who had irritated you. Maybe even justifiably so. And at that point the real pain of it all began to sink in. You saw yourself rationalizing your irritation and taking pride in your incapacity to transcend that situation and your irritation and had to lash out and do whatever you did relative to that other person or event or situation. And you saw yourself doing that. Have you ever experienced yourself as a spiritual infant? Well, that's been the experience of this week: a spiritual infant, being one who is incapable of spirit transcendence, one who is incapable of handling his irritation. I tell you, I've taken a journey that I've never taken before. I don't want to be the one who can't transcend his irritation, you know. I want to be one who can be transcending his irritation. And then the form of pride that creeps in there I'll speak of in a minute.

As I was brooding on this, it was like a great big baseball bat came down on top of my head from my ancient meditative friend. Out of nowhere came something like this: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God." I was in a state of spiritual poverty, incapable of any kind of spirit creativity, and the Word comes, blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who cannot transcend their situation and are trapped in the awareness of their own spiritual incapacity. Their own spirit debilitation. Is that not absurd? How can that kind of people inherit the kingdom of God; was my first question. The spiritual giants do that, you know, not the spiritually immature, not the spiritually debilitated, not the spiritually infantile. No. But the word comes, blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who are spirit failures. Blessed are those who are plagued with spirit laziness. Blessed are the unworthy ones. Blessed are the immature ones.

Spiritual pride that refuses its failure, that refuses its collapse, that refuses its weakness, that refuses its humiliation, is the greatest danger on the journey of spirit. The word humiliation has come to me in a way this week that I'll never forget. Just being the humiliated one, and hating every last minute of it, resenting what was going on in my life, and my own incapacity. And last night one of my colleagues asked me, "What was one of the most significant things that happened to you this week, Ed?" We were talking about the fact something like that. And immediately I felt ashamed. I just felt ashamed, as if my clothes had been taken off. And here was my own spiritual immaturity just staring me in the face as the most significant event of that week--or, the trying to run away from that and the struggle therein.

I would say that it's exactly at that point that the greatest spirit danger is. The most dangerous moment on the life of the journey in the spirit, the greatest of all temptations, is the refusal of one's humiliation, the refusal to recognize your deep rebellion against your immaturity. It is the temptation to live out of your pride in your weakness, rather than out of the Word that gives you permission to have the immature life that you have. The man or the woman who cannot receive the humiliation that God in his great love gives, collapses on the journey of the spirit. History belongs not to the spiritual giants, but to the failures in the spirit. I am offended even when I say that myself. History belongs to the poverty-stricken one, to the humiliated one. The spiritual giants are those who have taken the journey of humiliation and who in the midst of that dark, dark night have seen the kingdom of God.

For it is those who have taken that journey--not without deep struggle against spirit pride--who know that the power in history is the power of the Word, the power of the divine mercy in the midst of that humiliation to say a yes to their life. The word of absurd acceptance. They are the supremely confident ones, not in their own spiritual exercises or whatever, but only in the Word. And they know to the bottom of their toes that this is the power of history. And they know the fellowship of the humiliated ones. Not as the proud ones, but as the ones who know about themselves.

I guess pride is necessary to disclose your authentic weakness, and bring you to humiliation. But do not pretend for one minute that it is not the greatest of all temptations. The kingdom of God is the fellowship of the humiliated ones, who are supremely confident in the one Lord who gives them permission to be their humiliation.

Blessed are those who are the spiritually impoverished, for theirs is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the way it is. And the way it is runs the universe--not my little invention, not my pride system. God, in his graciousness, shatters to the very core your pride system and brings you to nothingness. That is the love of God, and the inheritors of the kingdom are only the shattered, they are only the broken ones.

We come to this meal, and that's what we re-enact, that we are the ones who have been given permission to have our genuine humiliation, to have our genuine brokenness, and to take that into ourselves as profoundly good.