

After John had been arrested, Jesus came and said, "The time of waiting is over. The Other World is upon you. Repent from your cynical gloom and believe the good news".

Having walked with Jesus for many days, the disciples became free men, wonder workers, men of uncanny power. Then Jesus died, and they discovered themselves alive with his life. When they saw that the world all about them was in need of their secret a huge weight settled in on their flesh and their bones. In John's gospel Peter says, "Let's go fishing." And they all go but catch nothing. But when Jesus calls out to them, they catch a whole boatload of fish. "It's him all right," they say. So he says to Peter, "Peter, feed my sheep." He makes it clear it is Peter's flesh and blood that is going to be the food in feeding the sheep. And Peter responds, "Well, what about John over there. What's his assignment going to be?" And Jesus answers, "What is that to you? Feed my sheep."

Martin Luther hears the freeing word and rejoices. But as he continues to stand in it the whole history of Europe is set down like a huge rock on top of his head. As long as he stands there vast importance comes into play: history turns on his head. The whole weight of the world is literally turned into a new channel.

I remember the first time I read the life of Martin Luther. That fact just overwhelmed me. What amazes me now is that Luther was not a morbid man. He was even a comedian. He was insanely positive about his life and about the lives of mankind, even with the whole sixteenth century sitting on his head. This is what I want to amaze over just a bit: Christians are not called to be morbid about the weight that falls on them. Pagans can do that much. Indeed, anybody is angry and full of self-pity when the weight of responsibility settles in on him--because it is suffering, it is hard work, it is anxiety, it is waking up at three in the morning with a lump in your belly. It is like being in prison with absolutely no way out.

Remember the sound of those doors, in The Man from La Mancha? How many doors were there that closed behind him? Those animals start stealing all his possessions, and even begin to burn his life's work and his life is threatened by a claw around his neck. Suddenly he hears that life is a prison! Life is a prison! Think about your marriage, think about our work, think about last quarter, think about the next quarter--life is a prison. And inside that prison life is tragic; and every tragedy, every place is all part of your tragedy. You are imprisoned in the whole 20th century.

The only way out so you are not crushed to the ground entirely, completely, and morbidly by this real solid, tragic life is to slip through a crack into the Other World. It is a very narrow crack, about the size of the eye of a sewing needle. You slip through this crack into a whole new world of sheer poetry, a world of adventure. All men are knights, and women are pure ladies who send their knights into battle and enthuse them with the virtue of their divine presence. Christians are not to be morbid about the world being dumped upon them, even pagans do that. The great rock of history is their vocation. You are knights in golden helmets. You are fair ladies, pure virgins. You are the son of Being itself. You are the place of the revelation of God. You are the heavenly city. You are a holy nation. You

are the royal priesthood after the Order of Melchisidek. These are the images that express the truth of the interior reality.

By realistic estimates of an objective sociologist, you are, at best, standing up straight in the dung heap of your own tragic life. The sociologist may not even notice that the world is sitting upon your head. He certainly will not see that your feet are levitating a full three inches off the ground. But on the inside, through the crack into the Other World, you are not just three inches off the ground. You are in a rocket ship that just did three turns around Mars as it is heading toward Jupiter at the speed of light. This is not wild unreality. Life is, in truth, an adventure, enthused by a lovely maiden and ending in victory over all of the forces of evil; and only the exuberance of this interior reality gets you three inches off the ground when sitting on your head is the whole agony of the 20th century. Now this is what life truly is. This, for me, is somehow the key point in all of our struggles to get something said in these areas. This is what life truly is. There is interior-filled exhilaration in the midst of tragedy, of course. Where else is there?

The first time I saw The Man of La Mancha as a play, I cried at the end for about twenty minutes. This time when I saw the movie, I cried from the beginning all the way through, especially where the songs were sung in the context of the tragedy: Dulcinea--the image of glory given to that woman; the Golden Helmet--that pitiful man standing tall under that magic headpiece. The song, "I like him". There is no reason for being in this absurd role. I just like him! "To dream the impossible dream"--in the face of sheer tragic contingency. Such imagery need not be some kind of an escape into romanticism, for it is the truth, it is the really real.

Jesus is such a glorious knight of honor, the picture of the sanctified man, the real man. He was born of a poverty stricken couple in the filth of a cow shed. He was executed for pretentious claims by the hard reality of the Roman law outside the gates of a Palestinian city. But there was a crack in this tragic life and through that crack speaks the whole glory of the kingdom of God.

And what is this faith? Faith gives structure to our hope, and makes us certain of realities we do not see. For it was for their faith that men of old stand on record. And what of ourselves? With all these witnesses to faith around us like a cloud we must throw off every encumbrance, every sin to which we cling, and run the revolution--the race for which we are entered, our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom faith depends from start to finish; Jesus, who for the sake of the joy that lay ahead of him endured the cross, making light of his disgrace, and took his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Think of him who submitted to such opposition from sinners. That will help you not to lose heart or grow faint. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. Have you forgotten the text of scripture which addresses you as "son" and appeals to you in these words: My son, do not think lightly of the Lord's discipline. Do not lose heart when he corrects you, for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves. He lays the rod on every son whom he acknowledges. You must endure it as discipline. God is treating you as Son. Can anyone be a son who is not disciplined by his father? If you escape the discipline which all sons share, you must be bastards and not true sons. Remember where you stand. You stand

before Mount. Zion in the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem, before myriads of angels in full concourse and assembly of the first born citizens of heaven, and God the Judge of all, and the spirits of good men made perfect, and Jesus the mediator of the new covenant whose spilled blood has better things to tell than the blood of Abel.

The story of the blood of Jesus is that story that authenticates all of our stories. When you hear that song, "Hail, Knight of the Woeful Countenance," you think of Don Quixote, you think of Cervantes, and you may also think of yourself, but you can also think of Jesus. How do you relate to that story? The man from La Mancha bounces off the man from Nazareth and both of those bounce off the man from Stillwater, or wherever you are from. You hear the true story of human existence and you hear it personally. I am the man; I am the Son of being itself. It is the power that I am what I am attempting to perform that sustains me. Authenticity is certainly a performance-- a crazy performance, but it is a performance on the way life is.

--Gene Marshall

