

101397
The Other World
Summer '72

The Endless Life

Trek XVI

Many years ago I was listening to Dylan Thomas read his own poems, and the one I liked best to hear him read went something like this:

"And death shall have no dominion/" He reads it kind of like that. Do you like that? Do you want me to read it one more time? "And death shall have no dominion/ And death shall have no dominion" The Apostle Paul has a similiar poem where he talks to Death straight out in a sort of chiding voice-

O death where is thy sting - (did you lose it in a card game?)
"O grave where has thy victory gone? We are still discussing the Sea of Tranquility, where light shines in the shadows where security dwells in the trials where rapture walks with woe and where death has lost its sting. Oh soul of man, would you not like to go there-on the other side of that place where the land of mystery has transformed the land of man on the other side of that day when freedom freely decided to be freedom you consciously cross the river and begin to ascend the mountain of responsibility for this world? It seems to me there is a very particular kind of rhythm of preoccupation between the mountain of care and the sea of tranquility. It would be unlikely that you could sustain care through the years if you did not also find yourself swimming in the sea as well. I have had a new friendship with Lake Michigan this July. As we have driven back and forth to the West Campus, I have also had a new gratitude for my experiences of the ocean. Ruth and I, when we were in the Army, took the option of coming back home from Europe on a transport ship rather than flying. We had never been on the ocean and it was really a ridiculous decision from any other perspective than a religious one and we were not really clear enough on religion then to know what we were doing in that area either. We had two little boys; they were both preschoolers and were in their harnesses to keep them from falling in the ocean. We also carried a little baby in our arms - the five of us boarded this boat - to see the sea. About half way between Europe and North America there was a storm that took place and they had this ship prepared for this - the tables were bolted to the floor and they had wide rails around them but still in spite of having your table and chair bolted to the floor it seemed an odd experience to have the whole room tilt up like this and your water glasses spew clear across the table to the other side or at night when you are in bed you find yourself standing up in bed one minute and standing on your head the next - suitcases sliding from one end of the room to the other. But the greatest experience of the power of the sea at all was to climb the stairs at the stern of the ship. Not only does the ship rock this way but it rocks from stern to bow. Now you are in the very stern of the ship and you are walking up these stairs. When the ship goes down you are utterly weightless you have to hold on to the banister to keep from taking off into the air and then the ship comes up the other way and you weigh double your weight. Can you imagine walking up stairs in that kind of a situation. The power of the sea, the ceaseless motion that never lets you forget about its absence is a powerful experience never to be forgotten. You look out across it as far as the eye can see and you know that it is deep - very, very deep ("And death shall have no dominion.") The awareness of the fact that you are personally going to die is the beginning point of the spiritual life (you can remember that 16 treks back perhaps.) Contingency is your real

life but man has to go on a journey to come to his contingency as a direct experience. If the doctor said you were going to die next Wednesday you would go on a journey relative to your contingency. And that journey you would go on would be a different thing than postulating the fact of your death. Some of us during the fast went on a journey in relation to our contingency. One of my colleagues said on the fast, "I am just aware that God is killing me-I am just a frail thing being drained away." What amazed me was his detachment about it all and mine. God - God - is killing me. When I was pastoring my first church and wrestling for the first time in my life with the sovereignty of God - (the awesome power you were over against), I was driving a car alone on a dark road between two of my churches and at night. All you could see was what your lights illuminated out ahead of you and while I was driving along (no other cars in sight) this bird came and smashed against my windshield - that shocked me awake in away to see that bird die so quickly over against my own eyes. Just a little bit further down the road a possum was standing right in the middle of the road and he was not moving. I tried to wave him off to the left and then to the right but no he did not move. My bumper made a sharp whack as he went flying through the air. A little bit further down the road there was a great big stone wall and my whole car and me went whap. Fortunately the stone wall was a mirage but it was all the same to me I was clear about something and found it possible to say in a new kind of way something that I had read in an old Psalm ("So you are brought to an end by thy anger and silenced by thy wrath/ Thou dost lay bear our iniquities before Thee and our lusts in the full light of Thy presence. All our days go by under the shadow of Thy wrath, our years die away like a murmur. Seventy years is the span of our life, eighty if our strength holds. The hurrying years are labor and sorrow; so quickly they pass; they are forgotten. Who feels the power of Thy anger, who feels Thy wrath like those who fear Thee. Teach us to order our days rightly, that we may enter the gate of wisdom.")

Dying is my God-given life, my authentic life, and when your contingency becomes transparently present to you your consciousness is something like - My God! I am already dead, I am already dead, I am already dead. Self-conscious dying to your life is the most impossible, the most difficult thing that was ever pulled off - it is like a miracle it is so difficult. It is much easier to have your beloved objects taken from you than to die to them while still keeping them. It is much easier to have your children taken away from you than to die to them while they still exist. It is much easier to have your leg chopped off than it is to die to it while it still hangs on. It is much more difficult to die to eating while you go on eating, than to stop eating. It is much more difficult to have your beloved hopes snatched from you than just one day to give up all hopes. But what is very hard for man, God performs for us in one day and we are dead just dead - dead to all things. And what a day this is! A day when the sea of tranquility is surging a deep surge. Death has already taken place and yet I live in intense solitude - able to intend my death - watch it, taste of it, feast upon it as a real experience in my life. One sort of has the feeling of standing on the moon watching your own body in its animal terror in the face of death. You have already died to the body, scorn the bodies protest against death and calm the soul's rebellion and pouting - "Be still my soul." stop your pouting. Here is a little bit of poetry from Camus' book Happy Death. "Since the day I first sneezed until this moment - his body had served him faithfully and opened him up to the world. But at the same time it lived a life of its own detached from the man it represented. For those few years it had passed through slow decomposition and now it had completed its trajectory and was ready to leave Meseroff and to restore him to the earth. In that sudden shudder which Meseroff was conscious his body indicated once more complicity which had already

won so many joys for them both solely for this reason Meseroff took pleasure in that shudder. Conscious he must be conscious - he must be conscious without dissension without cowardice, alone, face to face, at grips with his body, eyes open upon death. It was a man's business, not love nor landscape nothing but an infinite waste of solitude and happiness in which Meseroff was playing his last cards."

In such a state of being you have a feeling of invulnerability. It is hard to intimidate a man who has already decided to die. He is obstinate, he is stubborn, he has a droll sort of gaiety. One great resolve is to never to superficial, to scorn all superficial living-to stand and contemplate death and life - to resist unconsciousness of death and life and wish never to be dooped by some cheap salesman of life without death. On the backside of being a really dead man is finding a new and powerful life on your hands. "For when it is nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing then it is everything." As D. H. Lawrence put it:

"I was a tiger leaping into the sunlight"

Maybe it comes to you as I am the master of all my remaining days. They will be what I command them to be to the degree that astonishes even me. There was a movie made of some soldiers who were killed in combat all four of them killed dead and somehow in this movie, I can not even remember how this happened, all four of these soldiers were permitted to come back to life and fight another few days before dying, and so the movie was about these four dead men who were on the battlefield fighting their war and the astonishing style that was portrayed there, the wild drive, the risk, the exact thinking. I mean you never saw such warriors as those four dead samurai who nevertheless for some reason were alive. Jesus was a resurrected man like this from the beginning of the Gospels. He had already died his death and so you come on to him as alive, alive, alive, alive. When some Pharisees told him that Herod was planning to kill him it was almost like those Pharisees got back a sneer - He said, "Tell that fox I intend to be preaching the Kingdom of God right here a day or two and on down the road a day or two and then I'll be going on. It would not be right for a prophet to get killed outside of Jerusalem." That's a direct quote. The resurrected man is a weak powerless, dead creature that has to go aside to pray, he has to sleep in the back of the boat, he has to eat. His power is the power of the great sea of being. He's a powerless, finite creature, yet he has x-ray vision into everything. He walks through walls, he utterly changes lives, he utterly bends history. He's a weak, powerless creature but something beyond any understanding drives through his being. Maybe you saw that movie Man in the Wilderness where this man with his leg almost gnawed off and his face butchered up and his legs broken was left for dead in this open grave and after several days he got up and began to crawl out of this grave by his fingernails and to eat a crawdad and find his way to water and doctor his leg and finally returned to his community.

Watching that movie reminded me that living on the other side of death is a hard, hard, struggle. The resurrection stories in the New Testament are a lot like this. Here is this Jesus with a gashed side, holes in his hands, holes in his feet. I mean he was drained of all energy - he was just dead. He got up and he went to work - he ate fish and honeycomb and got things organized. I'm offended by these stories, and the offense that's in them for me is just the painful daily grind of particular action. And also deep down inside the resurrected life is a fight - a fight going on there every minute with the death urges. If having to die can wake you up in the night with a cold sweat, then having to be responsible for the powers of the resurrected life can put you to sleep in the middle of the day. Jesus got out of that tomb and worked 40 more days. That man in that movie crawled out of that grave and

returned to life and both of these stories offended my death urges. I kept saying in that movie you deserve a rest, just lay back there. Now I imagine you could have said that about Jesus. He had done a pretty good work. Why does he want to come out and work 40 days? The resurrected man is master of his death urges. It's like death urges themselves are turned into spirit intensity. The interior feel of such a state of being is wonder at the right now of life. Everyday seems like it is longer than all of history. There's an exhilaration of a surging power so insistent that it is uncomfortable - sort of like a deep nausea has been turned into sensitivity and drive - sort of like a spiritual vertigo has taken on a harness of practical living. One of my woodsman colleagues told the story of a man who was at the top of a hundred foot tree in one of these woodsman harnesses and he got vertigo and began to slide down the tree and someone began to yell at him from the ground to stick in his spurs. Apparently the way those harnesses work when you start to slide is you have to lean back in them and jam your spurs into the tree. If you try to grab hold of the tree you just go scooting on down. You've got to just sort of lean back and jab in your spurs if you want to stop. That story really impressed me because I recall those moments in which the spiritual vertigo got me and in which I just sort of immaturely slid on down to ruin. The resurrected life has a strange feel. It is vertigo turned into action, tactical action. Perhaps I'm already talking about the resolve: to live life right to the grave -- to live that intentionality that is there to live life right to the grave. To reclaim (and that's an active phrase) the dignity of life and the dignity of death. It's a day of celebrative action when funerals take place; it's a day of celebrative action to live and serve life -- this is the passion that appears in the weird life on the other side of being already dead. The solitariness of this dead-resurrected man is utterly total; there is no way to communicate with him in any way that would diminish that solitariness. Nevertheless, he lives in everlasting community with all those who have passed through the portal of death into resurrectional existence. This story of Mark's Gospel is a helpful story:

"Then some of the Sadducees, a party that maintains there is no resurrection, approached him and put this question to him: 'Master, Moses instructed us if a man's brother dies leaving a widow with no child, then the man should marry the woman and raise children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers - the first one of them married and died and left the whole issue and so on--you remember that story--and all these brothers marry the woman; then the woman dies. Now in the resurrection when men rise up again whose wife is she going to be, for she was the wife of all seven of them?' Jesus replies, 'Does this not show where you go wrong, how you fail to understand both the scriptures and the power of God? When people rise from the dead they neither marry nor are they given in marriage; they live like angels in the other world. For this matter of the dead being raised have you ever read in the book of Moses in the passage about the bush how God spoke to him in these words--I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob--God is not God of the dead but of living men. That is where you make your great mistake'."

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are living men. They live now in the other world. Soren Kierkegaard spent many hours talking with Abraham about his trip up the mountain. And many of us have spent many many hours talking with Jacob about his mortal combat with the Mystery. Just think of all the places in the Scriptures where the Scripture alone has turned to spirit for you and you have dwelt with these words even of unknown authors -- in a realm of glory that transcends any passing experience. The other world is populated with a vast league of flaming spirits - ancient and modern ones - Soren Kierkegaard is there himself, Bultmann, Tillich, Bonhoeffer, Niebuhr, secular people who are not theologians also made it. Man's world of consciousness is made by those who have gone on before. It is not W-16

that these people have left some kind of influence in history, I mean their lives make up the other world. They are the other world, the world of consciousness, and Abraham are one reality. There isn't any other world except the one that has Abraham in it. They're alive, the only thing that really is alive. As long as humanness lives, those who participate in the bottom of humanness and give shape to humanness will live as well. Luke:10 talks also a bit about this problem in a very personal kind of way -- I always liked his particular way of coming at it. "Later the seventy came back full of joy (the 70 had been out teaching RSI courses all over ancient Galilee). 'Lord,' they said, 'even evil spirits obey us when they use your name.' 'Yes,' returned Jesus, 'I was watching and saw Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightening. It is true I have given you the power to tread on snakes and scorpions and overcome all the enemy's power - there is nothing at all that can do you any harm, yet it is not your power over evil spirits that should give you such joy but the fact that your names are written in the other world.' Now isn't that something. Not that you've done such a good job making things happen out there in those courses that should give you such joy but the fact that your names are written -- that your name is written. It is not your success, your failure in history that should be such a joy to you but that your name has been written in the other world. If you have seen the light, that to live your humanness and live it as a gift, is the life, that your very frail and escape-ridden life is received and belongs to glory itself, that you have a name and it is written right alongside of Luther and Theresa and, well who is your name written alongside of? The names of saints live on forever, and your name is written; that's where you should take your joy. And what a resource this living community in the other world is--a resource of advice and judgement--it really shocked me to realize Jesus didn't have anybody else to go to for advice and so he went to his friends in the other world.

About eight days after that Jesus took Peter, James, and John and went off with them to the hillside to pray and while he was praying, the whole appearance of his face changed and his clothes became white and dazzling - and two men were talking with Jesus. They were Moses and Elijah, revealed in heavenly splendor that's the other world, and their talk was about the way he must take and the end he must fulfill in Jerusalem. But Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep and it was as they struggled into wakefulness that they saw the glory of Jesus and the two men standing with him. Just as they were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is wonderful for us to be here. Let's put up three shelters - one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah'- he did not know what he was saying. While he was still talking a cloud overshadowed them, awe swept over them, a voice came out of the cloud saying, 'This is my Son, my chosen, listen to him.' While the voice was speaking, they found there was no one there at all but Jesus.

It interests me that Jesus was talking to Moses and Elijah, the father of the law and the father of prophecy, and he was talking to them about his death and how that death needed to be placed in history. There was no one else to talk to about it; the disciples went to sleep when issues like this came up. But Moses was there and Elijah was there and now you and I have Jesus there to talk to too. Anytime you have something to talk about there's a myriad of friends. I understand Satan is there also in the other world -- watch who it is you're talking with. If you know you are talking with Satan, it's alright because that can be a very enabling conversation. If you know you are talking with Satan you just say no--or 'go to your place, Satan, 'or very pointedly, 'to hell with you' and so on. It's easy if you know Satan is Satan; the problem is, every saint in the other world is in need of some judgement, about 90 per cent saint and 10 per cent Satan, so you have

to have a criteria for judgement --this is a tangent, but an interesting one-- a criteria for judgement in the other world and of course, Jesus himself is providing you that criteria. The Word judges them all, and to the degree that the Word reveals them to be saints, they are saints, and to whatever degree the Word reveals them to be unsaints, they're unsaints. 'I and the Father am One' and 'I am the true other world' and 'the true other world am I' are acceptable. All kinds of phrases like this you see on Jesus' list. 'Before Abraham was I am' --that almost caused him to get stone, if you remember. Jesus is the revelation of God, of true humanness as well; all is judged by him. Humanness is just there and all who participate in humanness are just there as well. And the bottom of humanness is really very simple, it is just being the dead man you are, and lo, it is being the resurrection of the dead. Such deep thoughts as these are attended by a feeling that is hard to describe. It is a little too sober to be exuberant, but it is a confidence, of authenticity, that you find in your fellowship with the other world. Confidence that you're not psychotic, confidence that your foot need never slip. When all the saints go marching in, you will be watching them and you will be in their number-- a kind of comrade feel, a kind of overflowing, a delicate joy. There's a little Psalm, a very short one that has this kind of a feel to it:

How good it is and how pleasant for brothers to dwell together
in the other world, it is fragrant as oil poured upon the head
and flowing over the beard, it is like the dew of Herman
falling upon the hills of Zion, there the Lord disposes blessings
life forever more.

One experiences in the midst of such a subtle, wonderful, awesome state a powerful resolve to be one of that number [that's a great song, isn't it -- Oh Lord, I want to be in their number when the saints go marching in]. I don't want to let them down; I assume responsibility for sainthood itself, that all the flaming spirits of the other world might live again in my own life and in the life of mankind. There's a resolve to add the treasures of your own life to the great depository of the other world.

When man has been restored to be man, eternality is everywhere; that's the fourth step of this particular trek. Eternal humanness stands before the eternal God. The place where the eternality of God is revealed and the place where essential man is experienced is one and the same place. Yet this breakloose of eternality is not change in man's weakness. Man is still dying, and his dying is dying at the hands of the eternal and you might even say his dying at the hands of the eternal is his eternality. Man is the weakness of ashes. He's dead, black, grey charred ashes, ashes in which no fire could possibly burn and yet his ashes burn with an eternal flame. It struck me that in this particular point in the chart that Ash Wednesday and Pentecost Sunday are the same day of the year. There is infinite weakness, and yet there is the power of the entire sea of being. No grave can claim any victory over that life -- it's like you possess eternal power. Death wilts before your command.

'And death shall have no dominion,' 'Oh death, where is thy sting, Oh grave, where is thy victory' -- and yet you are dying and your contingency is a temptation to you, a temptation to use your power to have something which your true service of mankind forbids you. Temptation to use your power to exalt yourself in some subtle way, beyond the weakness of being utterly dependent upon God.

To say that my God is King is not the same thing as saying I am king. God's limiting role on my attempts to be something still stand, so you stand in sober fear of yourself. You know that the eternal powers within you can create a world of W-16

spirit in rebellion against the true world of spirit. That's the significance of that movie Cabaret: all those various worlds built in the cabaret that are in control of your life. They were an interior world alright but they weren't the true one. And to realize the potential of man to build another world that's a false one is an awesome realization, so God's sovereign rule is crucial in your life. It's crucial to know that the true other world always wins. And because you fear the satanic--and because you fear yourself--you glory in God's **decision** to be king and save you from all foolishness and falseness. The feeling that seeps through these thoughts is a dread filled glory that eternally is your God and yet dread of your own contingency and its capacities for rebellion. This Psalm gets hold of the feeling of that:

"The Lord is king - let the earth be glad - let coasts and islands all rejoice, cloud and mist enfold him, righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne, fire goes before him and burns up his enemies all around, the world is lit up beneath his lightening flash, the earth sees it and writhes in pain, the mountains melt like wax as the Lord approaches, the Lord of all the earth, the Heavens proclaim his righteousness and all peoples shall see his glory, Let all who worship idols, who vaunt their idols be put to shame. Bow down all gods before him. Die in her and rejoice. The cities of Judah were glad of thy judgement, Oh God, for Thou Lord art most high over all the earth, and are exalted above all Gods. Oh lovers of the Lord, those who hate evil, he keeps his loyal servants safe, he rescues them from the wicked - the harvest of life is sown for the righteous. Joy for all good men, you that are righteous rejoice in the Lord. And praise his holy name."

Another word to describe this state of being is "silence" - silence so deep you can hear a child cry on the other side of the earth. And this last mighty resolve seems to me is simply the resolve to praise God. So it just sounds like silence and praise, and silence.

"Oh praise the Lord, Oh praise God in his holy place. Praise him in the haunts of heaven, the vaults of his power. Praise him for his mighty works. Praise him for his immeasurable greatness. Praise him with fanfares on the trumpet. Praise him upon the lute and the harp. Praise him with tambourines and dancing. Praise him with flutes and strings. Praise him with the clash of cymbals. Praise him with triumphant cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Oh praise the Lord."

Gene Marshall

