

"For it was not through law that Abraham, or his posterity, was given the promise that the world should be his inheritance, but through the righteousness that came from faith. For if those who hold by the law, and they alone, are heirs, then faith is empty and the promise goes for nothing, because law can bring only retribution; but where there is no law there can be no breach of law. The promise was made on the ground of faith, in order that it might be a matter of sheer grace, and that it might be valid for all Abraham's posterity, not only for those who hold by the law, but for those also who have the faith of Abraham. For he is the father of us all, as Scripture says: 'I have appointed you to be father of many nations.' This promise, then was valid before God, the God in whom he put his faith, the God who makes the dead live and summons things that are not yet in existence as if they already were. When hope seemed hopeless, his faith was such that he became 'father of many nations', in agreement with the words which had been spoken to him: 'Thus shall your posterity be.' Without any weakening of faith he contemplated his own body, as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb, and never doubted God's promise, but, strong in faith, gave honour to God, in the firm conviction of his power to do what he had promised. And that is why Abraham's faith was 'counted to him as righteousness'.

Those words were written, not for Abraham's sake alone, but for our sake too: it is to be 'counted' in the same way to us who have faith in the God who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead; for he was delivered to death for our misdeeds, and raised to life to justify us."

Romans 4:13-25

The promise was made on the ground of faith, in order that it might be a matter of sheer grace, and that it might be valid for all of Abraham's posterity, not only for those who hold by the law, but also for those who have the faith of Abraham. For he is the father of us all, as scripture says: 'I have appointed you to be the father of many nations.' This promise, then, was valid before God, the God in whom he put his faith, the God who makes the dead live and summons things that are not yet in existence as if they already were' That is some God to have faith in, isn't it? 'When hope seemed hopeless, his faith was such that he became the father of many nations, in agreement with the word which had been spoken to him; Thus shall your descendents be.'" Without any weakening of faith he contemplated his own body, as good as dead, (for he was about a hundred years old) and also he contemplated the deadness of Sarah's womb, and never doubted God's promise in unbelief, but strong in faith, he gave honour to God, in the firm conviction of his power to do what he had promised. And that is why Abraham's faith (not because he had faith) and that is why Abraham's faith was counted to his as righteousness.' Those words were written not for Abraham's sake but for our sake. "It is to be 'counted' in the very same way with us who have faith in that God who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead; for he was given up to death for our misdeeds, and he was raised to life again in order to justify us."

That is the last part of the fourth chapter of Romans.

I have been thinking of Abraham recently. I suppose one of the things my papa drilled into me, in his eccentricity, was the image that Abraham was called "a friend of God." Isn't that something? Not that God was Abraham's friend, though it looks to me as if he were, but that Abraham was God's friend. What I have been wondering is why God needed a friend. I have thought, as I never thought before, that God is the solitary beyond solitariness. His detachment is awe-full. It is as if he were on an eternal fast; he is even detached in his engagement. It is like the cobra, always coiled, waiting to strike. We call this "waiting." When the rubric of time is the primary rubric by which you grasp after your moment-by-moment existence, you become aware of the mighty acts, or the mighty engagements, of God. You and I have lived our self-conscious life in that context.

But when something happens to shift you from the rubric of time to the rubric of space as the primary operating context of your life, then you begin to see the disengagement of God. That is, you see the purity of God, the chastity of God. Time is still there, but when one operates self-consciously in space, time speeds up. It is like light, which moves so quickly that you cannot see it move. So it is, when space is your rubric, that time is so intensified that you cannot see it. In the old days, you used to have a drop of spirituality once a year, and then you got to having it once a quarter, and then once a month, and then once a week, and then once a day, and then, you want to say, "My God! Stop it!" You know that experience. That is the speeding-up of time. In principle, of course, there is nothing that does not have spiritual germ that suddenly can sprout. Time is still there when you are operating out of the context of space, but you cannot see it, for it comes to you as space. Chastity is still there, to be sure. I wonder if you can even talk about chastity except within the rubric of space. What you experience is that the mighty acts of God, which always are the wringing out of the inner meaning of the givenness of life, get going so fast that you cannot see the engagement of God. All you see is his detachment.

When you begin to grasp something like what it means to be God's friend, you become aware of his solitariness, his loneliness. Again and again, in the poets of the faith, you have had this picture of the loneliness of God. He is always waiting. It is like a motion picture which is run so fast that all you see is a blur. All you see is the terrible loneliness of God waiting, waiting to have been. This is what a friend sees. If you do not see this, maybe you are not a friend of God. He is always waiting to have been, and he is always waiting to become, and he is always waiting to be. And to be is to have been and to become, I suppose. This is the radical solitariness of God which Kazantzakis caught.

When theologians in the past saw this, they suggested that God had to make himself into a trinity so he would have fellowship. But my problem is that since we made the triangles, they never seem to get together. God is always up here doing something, and the Son is always over here doing something, and the Holy Spirit is always over here doing something. So that has not solved God's loneliness for me. Anyway, when you look at one of the trinity, you always see the other two. It is a trinitarian loneliness. I believe that this is why God bestowed the gift of endlessness upon man. I was suddenly jolted with the awareness that receiving the gift of endlessness means that you participate in that eternal and terrifying solitariness with God. This dramatizes the fact that endlessness is not (as the

Greeks had it) an innate property of man. If you start that way, you end up in the kind of "pie-in-the-sky when you die by-and-by" sentimentalism, as if it were still the 19th century. Endlessness, like all states of being, comes as a gift, and part of the state of being is the vivid awareness that, whatever else it be, it is a gift. As a state of being, endlessness is not there unless there is an awareness of becoming the being of your being.

But this state of being is a rocking one. I think it only comes in the midst of tragedy, and tragedy is nothing more and nothing less than participating in your own death. The best picture you have of this, I think, is the Mount of Transfiguration story. I believe that Jesus did not see any glowing there; Peter, James and John saw the glowing. Jesus did not know that Moses and Elijah were there; only the disciples saw that. When Jesus looked down, there was not any glow at all. Probably what he saw was a non-glow or black light. It was in that situation that he became aware of becoming the being of his being. You notice where the gospel writers locate that: it was after Peter's great confession that Jesus made his first announcement of the fact that he was going to be crucified. He makes three announcements in each of the synoptic gospels. This was his first one, immediately after the transfiguration.

This is not the experience of knowing that you are going to die; that is way up in the Other World chart, about number one, whereas here you are all the way down in number sixty-four. This is knowing not that you are going to die but that you are going to be killed. You are going to be ground to pieces, precisely because of everything that has happened to you down through the sixty-three preceding states of being. That is the tragedy of it. And I mean ground to pieces, bit by bit. This is what your crucifixion is.

Every day, increasingly, I find myself day-dreaming about how I can get out of all this. My problem is, when I stop to think about it, I have no place to go. All I can do is go back to my form of the bourgeois life, whatever it was. I am aware, then, that you have nothing ahead of you except your own death. What you mean by the bourgeois life is that day by day you live toward your own death and that is all you have. No, if I left, I would just be doing this again, so why leave? A couple of years ago, perhaps I could have gone back; but now there is no going back; I am in this meat grinder. It is almost as if it were no longer a choice. Every time I go to make a choice, I say, "Why, it has already been made." It is that kind of thing. I am in this meat grinder.

It is exactly in the midst of that awareness that you become aware that you are becoming the being of your being. It is a frightening experience. I said to somebody, after about ten people said it to me, that this past 12 months have been by far the most productive in my sixty-one years, the most creative year of my life. And yet, in this year I have felt more inadequate than I ever have in my whole life. A colleague recently came knocking on my door. You could tell by the look on his face he was in trouble. And he says, "Joe, I want to talk a minute." And I said, "Sure." And he said, "My trouble is that I just feel humiliated all the time." So we sat down, because I also feel humiliated all the time. We dug a little into the experience of ontological humiliation over and beyond the moral. Do you know that throughout history they have called the crucifixion of Jesus "The Great Humiliation"? The great humiliation is when you become aware that you are becoming the being of your being, that you are in the meat grinder. There is

fascination before the awareness that even if you had a choice -- and by this time you do not have any -- that this is exactly what you would do.

I think it is at this point that we are fooling with time as a means to the state of being. I do not mean by this any cause and effect, but Being's relationship to your being comes clear. The Oriental mysteries touch on this point and their concept of the unity of life belongs in many of these states of being. My only fear-- this I want to maintain with my last hunk of energy--is over the absolutely crucial distinction between the subject and the object. I am not God, and God is not me. I am being, but being is not me. It is the awareness that your being is a participation in something that's got nothing whatsoever to do with your being. It is as though with wonder and horror that you become aware of this, with a force that was never there before. Every time I gaze at being, it is not my gaze, but the gaze of being itself. Finally this universe, and my universe, does not depend on my being, but it depends on my being being in me.

It is only when you grasp that your being is being, that you grasp that it is the being of being itself. I am getting close to what it means to be God's friend. Maybe Kazantzakis said it much better. I find it stated in Calvin's approach to predestination if you take that as a great literary form and not as some abstract dogma. I have often tried to illustrate it by saying that when you come up to the edge of the cliff, you find yourself deciding to jump, take the great leap forward. And then the moment that you make your decision, it is in that very instant, with no gap of time, that there comes the awareness that you did not decide; you were pushed. This is what I mean by your becoming aware. This is going through freedom; it is going through decision, in the midst of which you become aware that that which you cannot bite on, Being in itself, is manifesting itself in your being. Of course, when you are being your being, you understand that you are building God, saving God, manifesting God. But in the midst of this comes the awareness that you are the manifestation of Being.

This is the point at which you become aware, not of being beyond certitude and uncertainty or of being beyond good and evil, but of being beyond life and death. Then it is that the awfulness comes, when you and I want to die, in the midst of never wanting to die. I am just a part of that seventy-five or eighty-five-year-old woman or man saying, "I want to die. There is no more use for me, and I am tired, and my body is going to rot, and my brain is not doing as well as it used to." What you could say to those people is, "So what?" All of us want to die; that is Thanatos in us, and it has many faces. Every sixteen-year-old kid knows all about that; it is always there. At this moment, you know that life and death are the inventions of man, that Being-in-itself knows nothing about life and death, any more than it knows anything about good and evil. Being only observes humanness. You and I invent the life and death, and it is an awfully important invention, but if humanness observes Being, Being observes only Being.

This is what the fourth chapter of Romans is all about. This is what you mean when you say that nobody is fully human until he dies. Save you participate in that great act of humanness, you have not been fully human. This is what you mean, although you feel halfway psychotic about it. And there is the great fascination of Being beyond life and death. It is now that this endlessness which you have been experiencing is dropped on you like a ten-ton crane. The way it comes to you, I believe, is that you are aware that whatever you mean by Being itself bestows upon you the gift of participating in its endlessness--even when we do not desire to be endless. And that is the great fascination.

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