

Circa 1970  
Ocilla Georgia  
A Saturday afternoon

In the living room of my grandmother's house, sitting in the very same chair that she rocked me in as a baby I made the mistake of saying....I'm bored.

Note to children everywhere....and adults for that matter....saying your bored is tantamount to saying that you are not smart enough to find a way to entertain yourself....or so said my maternal grandmother who by the way I adored...Nana said...you need to take up a hobby Tammy and I am going to help you do that....She was a person who was incredibly gifted as both a musician and an artist...we fight over her paintings in the family, we have pieces of fine china that she delicately created....we all have her needlework...we hear her playing the piano in our minds.....so began the saga of my Nana trying to teach me to crochet....I will spare you the details but suffice to say you can only repeat a stitch so many times until the yarn disintegrates... So instead I took up watercolor painting at the dining room table and when the paper soaked through onto the Maplewood of the table she moved me to the piano and taught me how to read music and when she grew tired of the missed notes she took me into the kitchen and taught me how to make jello in the brown pottery bowl and when that was done, We commenced learning card games. That was the Saturday I learned about taking up something...and to never again, literally announce that I was bored.

Today we hear in Mark's Gospel the call to take up something alright.... and I must admit there have been times in my life that the practice of my faith appeared more like a hobby than a passion, a pastime rather than a divine invitation for transformation...a begrudging duty instead of an act of love....This past week I started thinking about how many times I literally took up a cross during a single day...and yet did not take it up...those days that I .picked one up and carried it without thought....

- \* children's chapel cross
- \* the crosses on my jewelry
- \* the cross made by our contractor for Noah when he died

Each of these actions, iconic, symbolic of the larger call, the bigger hope, the more demanding and oh subtle yet absolute call to conversion.

We interact with the cross everyday in some way either by seeing it visually around people's necks or atop churches , noticing it absently in nature ...two sticks lying on top of one another forming the image or etched in stone ...you cannot drive into the parking lot of St Paul's without seeing it everywhere in the graveyard or on our publications and yet there is the cross that is imprinted in our dna....the consequence of being made in the image and likeness of God...connected into the Trinity...a connection begun at the Incarnation and continued at our own nativity and into all the days of our lives...Christopher Blumhardt says it this way...

There remains a precious jewel in every person, which is stronger than any outward pressure in their lives. ... No matter how badly they have ruined their lives, this jewel remains in them; it is as certain as that God was reconciling the world to himself in Jesus Christ. There is something in each person that will never be lost, something that can always be resurrected. That is the gospel.

It is as if God is taking our brokenness and weaving into the cross all the other brokenness in this world gathering it into the reach as the collect says of his saving embrace....such strength in those broken places....I know you know that when bones grow back after having been broken they are actually stronger where they are broken....reknitting is better than knitting or as the prophets say repeatedly to Israel after she has lost everything again and again...regain is better than gain....

It seems in this world that to be open to the saving power of the Cross means transformation is always an option even when there isn't one. So we test that truth and sit and imagine where those places are where God cannot or wont go so heinous the crime....we have our lists of unforgivable sins....or at I least I have mine and I would suspect all of ours have similar things on them...but if God is to be God then there are no exceptions to this rule....consequences and punishment yes for past behaviors, egregious horrific sins, but transformation with the God who neither turns his head at what has been done nor his heart to victim and

perpetrator alike....it is we who turn...you may recall that scene in dead man walking where the Mathew Poncelet's victims father upon learning of death of his son fell down to his knees repeating over and over again forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us....when asked why...he said , I knew if I didn't do it then... I would never do it...and that's what I am called to do....

That kind of faith at the intersection of that kind of suffering you don't forget...

There is an Hasidic saying

“It is not within our power to place the divine teachings directly in someone else's heart. All that we can do is place them on the surface of the heart so that when the heart breaks they will drop in”

We so often don't know the hope of God until we are broken down and broken open...our tears and suffering often the fertilizer for spiritual growth and change. Do I like that? Do I think that's the best way to make it come about? NO...but I wasn't consulted on the master plan only told that this is the path.

What I have been consulted on is my participation in turning....in the turning toward and the turning around....This season of Lent is about the turning into the heart of God like a child hides within a parents arms...its about trying on that cross for size and seeing if within you there is a fit for the suffering in your

world... a place where God can begin anew within you, the chemist for the worst this world dishes up indiscriminately.

A last word of advice....To one of her spiritual directees struggling with taking up the cross in her own life...

Evenlyn Underhill the great Anglican mystic and theologian wrote in a letter:

But I

know too that surrender is the ONLY way out of this. Humility and WILLING suffering have got to be learned if we want to be Christians, and some people learn them by boredom instead of by torture. But once you really surrender it is extraordinary how the nastiness goes and you perceive that it was the “shade of His Hand outstretched the entire time.”

Reaching, reaching, reaching.....

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