

Midweek Meditation # 9 ~

ON BEING AND ON BEING THERE FOR OTHERS

**"We mostly spend [our] lives conjugating three verbs: to Want, to Have, and to Do. Craving, clutching, and fussing, on the material, political, social, emotional, intellectual ~ even on the religious ~ plane, we are kept in perpetual unrest: forgetting that none of these verbs have any ultimate significance, except so far as they are transcended by and included in , the fundamental verb, to Be: and that Being, not wanting, having and doing, is the essence of the spiritual life."
~ Evelyn Underhill, The Spiritual Life**

I thought of this quote as I hung up the phone the other day. I had just told a friend that I was looking forward to preaching again this fall because I felt that the discipline of preparing and delivering sermons would give me a better sense of purpose. While there certainly may be some truth to that statement, I began to wonder if I wasn't looking in the wrong place for meaning and purpose. I have more time right now than I ever thought I would have to contemplate my Being without the usual pressure to Do. Yet I found myself yearning to get back on the treadmill of wanting, having and doing! As usual, a quick check of scripture helped to give insight.

Jesus Christ models the ultimate sense of purpose in the Gospels. His sense of who He is, or rather **Whose He is**, becomes the foundation of what he accomplishes throughout the New Testament accounts of His life. Beginning with His time in the Temple at age 12, through His baptism, temptation in the wilderness, the experience on the Mount of Transfiguration, the upper room discourse, the garden of Gethsemane and the Cross, Jesus knows Himself to be His Father's Son. It is His awareness of this relationship, this Being the beloved Son of the Father, that keeps Him on course and enables Him to ignore the many distractions and detractors that would divert Him from His purpose.

Yet like so many other elements of our faith, there needs to be a second track to make the "train" really run. When Jesus reinterprets the most important commandment of the Law in the Shema, there are two concurrent tracks to run on: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Knowing whose I am must lead to loving and caring for others or the meaning and purpose it offers dissolve into empty, self-absorbed piety.

Before his death in a Nazi prison, Dietrich Bonhoeffer prepared notes for a book which he never had the chance to write. It would have been entitled "Being There for Others". In those notes, which appear in print in Letters and Papers from Prison, Bonhoeffer explains the other track that Jesus ran on: "Jesus is there only for others. His 'Being there for others' is the experience of transcendence. It is only this 'being there for others' , maintained till death, that is the ground of his omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Faith is participation in this being of Jesus (incarnation, cross and resurrection). Our relation to God is a new life in 'existence for others, through participation in the being of Jesus. The transcendental is not infinite and unattainable tasks, but the neighbor who is within reach in any given situation."

While I may spend some of my time very profitably conjugating the verb to Be, my sense of purpose as a child of my Father will only be clear and consistent if it leads me to be there for others in the way Jesus was there for His contemporaries. That will probably happen for me more in the chance encounters I have with my neighbors than in the preparation and delivery of sermons, no matter how profitable that experience continues to be. Pray for me that in this time of less doing and more being God will continue to help me transcend the narrow limits of my faith, expand my understanding of His all consuming love, and draw me closer to Him through more intentional "being there for others."

May your week be filled with God's all powerful presence as you seek His will. Under God's mercy, Howie