

May 1, 2006 What is God doing?

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 The world is unprincipled. It's dog-eat-dog out there! The world doesn't fight fair. But we don't live or fight our battles that way-never have and never will. The tools of our trade aren't for marketing or manipulation, but they are for demolishing that entire massively corrupt culture. We use our powerful God-tools for smashing warped philosophies, tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God..

What is God doing? He is saving; he is rescuing; he is blessing; he is providing; he is judging; he is healing; he is enlightening. There is a spiritual war in progress, an all-out moral battle. There is evil and cruelty, unhappiness and illness. There is superstition and ignorance, brutality and pain. God is in continuous and energetic battle against all of it. God is for life and against death. God is for love and against hate. God is for hope and against despair. God is for heaven and against hell. There is no neutral ground in the universe. Every square foot of space is contested.

Jeremiah, before he was born, was enlisted on God's side in this war. He wasn't given a few years in which to look around and make up his mind which side he would be on, or even whether he would join a side at all. He was already chosen as a combatant on God's side. And so are we all. No one enters existence as a spectator. We either take up the life to which we have been consecrated or we traitorously defect from it. We cannot say, "Hold it! I am not quite ready. Wait until I have sorted things out."

May 2, 2006 What we do best?

2 Corinthians 9:11-12

He gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing with us great praise to God.

Giving is what we do best. It is the air into which we were born. It is the action that was designed into us before our birth. Giving is the way the world is. He makes no exceptions for any of us. We are given away to our families, to our neighbors, to our friends, to our enemies- to the nations. Our life is for others. That is the way creation works. Some of us try desperately to hold on to ourselves, to live for ourselves. We look so bedraggled and pathetic doing it, hanging on the dead branch of a bank account for dear life, afraid to risk ourselves on the untried wings of giving. We don't think we can live generously because we have never tried. But the sooner we start the better, for we are going to have to give up our lives finally, and the longer we wait the less time we have for the soaring and swooping life of grace.

May 3, 2006 A Life of Daily Prayer

1 Timothy 2:1 The first thing I want you to do is pray. Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know.

The outside is a lot easier to reform than the inside. Going to the right church and saying the right words is a lot easier than working out a life of justice and love among the people you work and live with. Showing up at church once a week and saying a hearty Amen is a lot easier than engaging in a life of daily prayer and Scripture meditation that develops into concern for poverty and injustice, hunger and war.

May 4, 2006 Gift of words

Proverbs 25:11-12 The right word at the right time is like a custom-made piece of jewelry. And a wise friend's timely reprimand is like a gold ring slipped on your finger. The gift of words is for communion. We need to learn the nature of communion. This requires the risk of revelation- letting a piece of myself be exposed, this mystery of who I am. If I stand here mute, you have no idea what is going on with me. You can look at me, measure me, weigh me, test me, but until I start to talk you do not know what is going on inside, who I really am. If you listen and I am telling the truth, something marvelous starts to take place- a new event. Something comes into being that was not there before. God does this for us. We learn to do it because God does it. New things happen then. Salvation comes into being; love comes into being. Communion. Words used this way do not define as much as deepen mystery- entering into the ambiguities, pushing past the safely known into the risky unknown. The Christian Eucharist (Holy Communion) uses words, the simplest of words, "this is my body, this is my blood," that plunge us into an act of revelation which staggers the imagination, which we never figure out, but we enter into. These words do not describe, they point, they reach, they embrace. Every time I go to the ill, the dying, the lonely, it becomes obvious after a few moments that the only words that matter are words of communion. What is distressing is to find out how infrequently they are used. Sometimes we find we are the only ones who bother using words this way on these occasions. Not the least of the trials of the sick, the lonely and the dying is the endless stream of clichés and platitudes to which they have to listen. Doctors enter their rooms to communicate the diagnosis, family members to communicate their anxieties, friends to communicate the gossip of the day. Not all of them do this, of course, and not always, but the sad reality is that there is not a great deal of communion that goes on in these places with these ill and lonely and dying people, on street corners, in offices, in work places, in schools. That makes it urgent that the Christian becomes a specialist in words of communion.

May 5 Forgiveness

Colossians 3:13-14 Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it. The word *forgiveness* has been watered down by journalistic cant and careless practice. It frequently means no more than, "I'll let it go this time- I won't let it bother me- but don't do it again." It is the verbal equivalent to a shoulder shrug. So there needs to be repeated return to the New Testament to renovate the word, to discover its vitality, its strength, its power, its versatility; to realize that it is the most creative act anyone can engage in; to know that more new life springs from acts of forgiveness than anything else; and to believe that the parent who is called on to engage in an act of forgiveness is in a literally god-like position.

May 6 –Fashioned from the same clay

Revelation 22:8-9...when I heard and saw, I fell on my face to worship at the feet of the angel who laid it all out before me. He objected, " No you don't! I'm a servant just like

you and your companions, the prophets, and all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

All the same, we continue to have an unquenchable thirst for wholeness, a hunger for righteousness. When we get thoroughly disgusted with the shams and cretins that are served up to us daily as celebrities, some of us turn to Scripture to satisfy our need for someone to look up to. What does it mean to be a real man, a real woman? What shape does mature, authentic humanity take in everyday life?

When we do turn to Scripture for help in this matter we are apt to be surprised. One of the first things that strikes us about the men and women in Scripture is that they were disappointingly non-heroic. We do not find splendid moral examples. We do not find impeccably virtuous models. That always comes as a shock to newcomers to the Scripture. Abraham lied; Jacob cheated; Moses murdered and complained; David committed adultery; Peter blasphemed.

We read on and begin to suspect intention: a consistent strategy to demonstrate that the great, significant figures in the life of faith were fashioned from the same clay as the rest of us. We find that Scripture is sparing in the information that it gives on people while it is lavish in what it tells us about God. It refuses to feed our lust for hero worship. It will not pander to our adolescent desire to join a fan club. The reason is clear enough. Fan clubs encourage secondhand living. Through pictures and memorabilia, autographs and tourist visits, we associate with someone whose life is (we think) more exciting and glamorous than our own. We find diversion from our own humdrum existence by riding on the coattails of someone exotic.

May 7 Square One

Hebrews 11:1-2 The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see. The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd.

The first few months of our lives are spent in getting things ready, getting our basic needs met so that we can journey. Many of you have had an analogous experience in, say, going for a backpacking trip into the mountains. You spend days getting things ready, laying out the proper clothing, measuring out quantities of food, making sure the tent is waterproofed, checking the first aid kit for essentials. And then you are at the trailhead. Up to this point almost nothing is under your control- most of what you are dealing with now is invisible, uncertain, unpredictable- changes in the weather, the appearance and behavior of wild animals, your own physical endurance and the mood of your hiking companions. You have arrived at Square One.

Up to Square One, you live by sight; after Square One, you live by faith. Basic biology now gives way to basic spirituality. No longer confined by sense, feelings, and immediacy, we are launched into exploration and participation in the immense world of memory, anticipation, waiting, trust, belief, sacrifice, love loyalty, faithfulness- none of which can be reduced to what you can see and handle. None of these things that go into

making up what is distinctively and characteristically human in us can be possessed- they all must be entered into. Most of what is, is not where we can touch it, put it in our mouths, be wrapped in its warm comfort. Square one is the place from which we begin learning how to live with Absence with the same ease with which we have come to live with Presence. The generic word that we use for this is Faith- in its classic and never yet improved upon definition, “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Hebrew 11:1)