

Theology of Suffering

The Promise of Paradox by Parker Palmer

"The cross signifies that pain stops here. The way of the cross is a way of absorbing pain, not passing it on; a way which transforms pain from destructive impulse in to creative power. When Jesus accepted the cross, his death became a channel for the redeeming power of love. When we accept the crosses and contradictions in our lives, we allow that same power to flow. When we give our hearts to the world, our hearts will be broken. But the irony is that they are broken open to become channels for a love greater than our own. Only as pain is transformed which promises to take us toward the peaceable kingdom.

"With its emphasis on suffering, the way of the cross may be misunderstood as masochistic, especially in an age so desperately in search of pleasure. But the suffering of which Jesus spoke is the suffering already present in the world which we can either ignore or identify with. If pain were not real, if it were not the lot of so many, the way of the cross would be pathological. But in our world, with its hungry and homeless and hopeless, it is pathological to live as if pain did not exist. The way of the cross means letting that pain carve one's life into a channel through which the healing stream of the spirit can flow to a world in need.

"The way of the cross is a way not of despair but of joy. If Jesus was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" he was also the one who said "my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mt 11:30). For what we lose on the cross is the burden of falsehood and illusion. What lives beyond the cross is the uplifting power of love. The great paradox of the crucifixion is Christ's victory over death is supreme. The paradox of our own crossing points is that pain kills illusion so that truth can bring joy.

"Resistance is the most predominant stage of growing in the way of the cross. There is much in our human nature that resists living the contradictions; much in us that tries to avoid tension, avoid life torn between the poles, avoid living on the cross. By living fully in our tensions, neither denying nor ignoring them, we will be pulled open to the power of the Spirit.

"The cross contradicts itself. For the powerlessness of the cross, if it is fully entered, leads us to a place of power. This is the great mystery at the heart of Christian faith: The power of powerlessness. Or is it a mystery? As long as my center or focus is occupied with the works of my own feeble powers, there will be no space for God's power to flow through me."

~Parker Palmer