



Resistance is not Futile!

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Readings

Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17 (NRSV)

Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.

Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you;

save your servant who trusts in you.

You are my God; be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you do I cry all day long.

Gladden the soul of your servant,

for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,

abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.

Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer;

listen to my cry of supplication.

In the day of my trouble I call on you,

for you will answer me.

There is none like you among the gods, O Lord,

nor are there any works like yours.

All the nations you have made shall come

and bow down before you, O Lord,

and shall glorify your name.

For you are great and do wondrous things;

you alone are God.

Matthew 10:34-39 (NRSV)

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

Emanuel Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven* §2799

That “...he took in his hand the fire and the knife” signifies the good of love and the truth of faith, is evident from the signification of “fire,” as being the good of love; and from the signification of a “knife,” as being the truth of faith. That the knife used upon the victims in the sacrifices signified the truth of faith, may be seen from the signification of a “sword” or “little sword” in the Word; for instead of “knife” it is said “little sword.” Both have the same signification, but with the difference that the knife used for sacrifices signified the truth of faith, but a sword truth combating; and as a knife is rarely mentioned in the Word, for a secret reason to be mentioned presently, we may show what a “sword” signifies. A “sword” in the internal sense signifies the truth of faith combating, and also the vastation of truth; and in the opposite sense falsity combating, and the punishment of falsity.”

My life is in danger... everyday I exist. From what I eat (or not)... to driving... to running errands... to places I frequent as someone queer-identified. I am at risk. Though I am granted privilege to the point where my risk of perishing is greatly reduced compared to others. And I also have enough privilege to where I don't have to think about risk. I could be very easily lulled into the space or comfort zone where I experience minimal or no risk.

The passage selected from the Gospel we heard earlier is in the midst of Jesus sending out the twelve disciples. It is not a light message and yet it is often glossed over. We can easily say, "Yeah I know what Jesus meant. He was the Prince of Peace after all." We have the ability to pick and choose. It is a great temptation to transcribe the words to fit our lifestyle rather than the other way around. In a sermon by Dr. Kirk Byron Jones he says,

"Put these statements together: 'Do not fear those who kill the body...Whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father... I have not come to bring peace, but a sword... And one's foes will be of one's own household members...And whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.' What comes across is less an invitation to adventure and more a recipe for disaster. In five sentences, Jesus has made following him not only less attractive but nearly impossible. He's asking for too much; he's asking for it all. How dare Jesus! What right does Jesus have to ask those who would follow him to risk it all?"¹

I remember listening to Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence deliver his "Charge to the Ordinands" during my ordination service. It was charming and filled with Jim's natural humor. He joked about all we would need was a staff (not the professional entourage variety—think Moses) for our ministry. It was cute. Perhaps it was my nervousness or my naïveté that got the better of me. I think if I really let the weight of what was being said sink in I may have run out of that room and never looked back. And yet, here I am ten years later speaking about that risk. That call. In this case, that charge.

Sure, I'm a minister, and of course I answered a calling that got me to this place—and maybe it seems "easy" to talk about this kind of risk. It's part of the job many will say. What does it matter for everyone else? I hear the weight of what Jesus says to his disciples from what I was charged with ten

¹ Kirk Byron Jones. "The Delightful in the Demanding." *The Minister's Annual Manual: For Preaching and Worship Planning*, Volume 27, 2013-2014, 389-391

years ago and also when the disciples were first told two millennia ago—and it has not changed. Perhaps there are tipping points along the way that make the words feel heavier. And we are experiencing one such tipping point. Look around. Everything is being re-examined.

We are in a holy shake down. How we respond and who will we be on the other side of this point in time are undeniably linked. This is where our theology can come into play. As the passage from *Secrets of Heaven* goes on to say after what we read earlier:

“The meaning of ‘a sword’ in the genuine sense as truth engaged in conflict, and in the contrary sense as falsity engaged in it, also the vastation of truth and the punishment of falsity, has its origin in the representatives that occur in the next life. For in that life, when anyone utters that which he knows to be false, daggers so to speak instantly come down over his head and strike terror, while truth engaged in conflict is represented there as well by objects which have sharp points like the tips of swords; for such is the nature of truth if it is devoid of good, but if it exists together with good it is rounded and gentle. Such being the origin of the meaning of a sword, therefore with angels, whenever a knife, spear, small sword, or sword is mentioned in the Word, truth engaged in conflict comes to mind. (AC 2799.21)”²

So then what is our calling? On one hand we get the message from Jesus that he did not come to bring peace but a sword—and on the other hand we are being told to walk into the fray. In other words, we are at risk if we consider ourselves remotely aligned with Christ.

Ultimately, we are called to engage in the truth and specifically the truth of faith. The Great Commission or Sending Forth is not the easy road. It is long, arduous, and offers little reward. But it’s necessary. One of the great temptations is to sit idle and be self-absorbed...but man is that comfortable. And yet, I know this is not my true calling. My calling as minister is wrapped up in my calling as an angel in training—what the writings tell us is the point of existence. If I believe any part of this—I have to go beyond myself and what I know and engage in the fray. It’s all risk! And when I move beyond self-absorption and see how the vulnerable members of our nation are at risk—I am compelled to act regardless of my vocation. And yet because of my vocation there is greater risk when I chose to engage

² Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Arcana Coelestia*. New York, Swedenborg Foundation, 1984.

and stand up—when I live the words of the Golden Rule: do unto others as I would have them do unto me. I feel the words “truth engaged in conflict” around me.

My risk is resistance: resisting what family members say that holds up false ideologies, resisting policies and words spoken among my colleagues on the Council of Ministers, resisting hatred in the public square, resisting that which goes against the Divine truth I hear in the Scriptures I know and love. Resisting falsity is holy and is our calling as citizens of this amazing planet. This is one such moment when we need to remember that while Jesus the Christ who is also referred to as the Prince of Peace—told us in the Gospel of John, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”³

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