



Sunday, May 31, 2020

“Seeking to Understand”

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Riots started because of death of George Floyd

Today we must listen with an openness to the young people protesting. Not try to silence them. We must hear and understand what is being asked and be open to change.

Prayer of St Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me bring love.
Where there is offence, let me bring pardon.
Where there is discord, let me bring union.
Where there is error, let me bring truth.
Where there is doubt, let me bring faith.
Where there is despair, let me bring hope.
Where there is darkness, let me bring your light.
Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.
O Master, let me not seek as much
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love,
for it is in giving that one receives,
it is in self-forgiveness that one finds,
it is in pardoning that one is pardoned,
it is in dying that one is raised to eternal life.

I have been reflecting on the number of times I have seen riots from the Watts riots in the mid 1960's to today. And the number of people of minorities suppressed and killed.

Rodney King was the first black man who was beaten when it was caught on camera and released to the public. There was hope that because it was seen and documented that people would awaken to the way black and other minorities are treated. And that by seeing it, it would change.

How many more videos have been released? Who is held responsible for these things.

Historically minority groups have been suppressed and at some point any Life energy that is suppressed will explode in direct preposition to the suppression. This is simply Science. I have an original metal water pipe put into my house in 1925. It has been buried for years under pressure both from the force of the water within and the outer environment it is planted in. It burst Saturday, and not in a small way! Water boiled up from the ground like a caldron on an intense fire.

Consider the American Revolution, the French Revolution, The Women's Movement, The Gay riot in San Francisco when Harvey Milk's killer was deemed not guilty, the Civil Rights Movement which is really still happening. All of these have both the internal pressure of the individual and the external intense pressure of the social environment they were and are in.

So I understand the protests.

I have gone to Howard Thurman's writings to find some answers to help us today. Howard Thurman was the first African-American to travel to India and meet with Gandhi, who at the time was building the consciousness of his followers to be able to move to non-violence demonstrations to win independence for India.

One of Rev. Thurman's greatest works is "Jesus and the Disinherited" written in 1949. He writes this exploration of the historical Jesus as a way to explore the Christian message for people "whose backs are against the wall." And that is exactly the position we find the black community and other minorities to be in.

Consider the message sent when four police officers kill George Floyd, a black man, in front of a group of black people asking them to stop. I want to be clear here that I do not believe all police and security people act like these did, however, enough have happened (without accountability or justice) that we have seen too many instances like this. So these four police officers called to a scene for a minor crime escalate the abuse of this man. And almost as if they are intentionally sending a message to everyone watching, they not only wait until he is unresponsive, but they continue to hold him down about 3 minutes after he has stopped responding, as they stare the people down who are there pleading with them to stop. The message is "We can do this to him and we can do it to you, so you had better stay in line." The underlying message is that these people have to live not to express their life energy, creativity, and God-self but instead to find a way to simply not be killed.

This is the suppressing message of discrimination and suppression of all minority groups by a larger dominant and controlling society

Howard Thurman observed: “What are words, however sacred and powerful, in the presence of the grim facts of the daily struggle to survive? Any attempt to deal with this situation on a basis of values that disregard the struggle for survival appears to be in itself a compromise with life. **It is only when people live in an environment in which they are not required to exert supreme effort into just keeping alive that they seem to be able to select ends besides those of mere physical survival. On the subsistence level, values are interpreted in terms of their bearing upon the one major concern of all activity — not being killed. Not to be killed becomes the great end, and morality takes its meaning from that center. Until that center is shifted, nothing real can be accomplished. It is the uncanny and perhaps unwitting recognition of this fact that causes those in power to keep the disinherited from participation in meaningful social process.** For if the disinherited get such a new center as patriotism, for instance—liberty within the framework of a sense of country or nation—then the aim of not being killed is swallowed up by a larger and more transcendent goal. Above all else the disinherited must not have any stake in the social order; they must be made to feel that they are alien, that it is a great boon to be allowed to remain alive, not be exterminated. This was the psychology of the Nazis; it grew out of their theory of the state and the place given the Hebrew people in their ideology. Such is also the attitude of the Ku Klux Klan towards Negroes.”

Let's look at Jesus's life - He was born a Jew. He was born poor. He was a member of a minority group suppressed by the larger dominant and controlling group, the Roman Empire. Jewish men could be taken off the streets for no reason by any Roman soldier and killed with no repercussions to the killer. In fact the entire city of Sepphoris, was destroyed by the Romans to suppress a revolution started by a Jew named Judas prior to Jesus's birth. Jesus was not a Roman Citizen like Paul was. As a Roman citizen Paul enjoyed a certain amount of protection. For one he could not be killed like Jesus could and was. Jesus was aware of the common concerns of his people and shared in them. He also had to answer the **question: “What must be the attitude toward the rulers, the controllers of political, social, and economic life?”** Howard Thurman states this is the question all disinherited people have to answer.

Some of the Jews of this time were called Zealots and these were the people that believed that action had to be taken against the Roman government to free Israel. Thurman writes: “Armed resistance is apt to be a tragic last resort in the life of the disinherited. Armed resistance has an appeal because it provides a form of expression, of activity, that releases tension and frees the oppressed from a disintegrating sense of complete impotence and helplessness. ‘Why can't we do something? Something must be done!’ Is the recurring cry. By ‘something’ is meant action, direct action as over against words, subtleties, threats and innuendos. It is better to die fighting for freedom than to rot away in one's chains, the argument finds.” Perhaps this can help us understand the actions happening this week by some of the people.

An important thing to note is that this time we are starting to hear the voice of not only the disinherited but also people of the controlling majority. Heads of Police and other law enforcement agencies are stating the misuse of power in George Floyd's killing, people from all backgrounds are joining in the protests and in the clean up that is happening. Fred Rogers said to look to the helpers and they are there both among the Black community and other supporting communities.

So what are the spiritual principles that need to be applied to this situation that can assist us in finding understanding?

First is the statement of Jesus: "**Know ye not that ye are gods, children of the Most High?**" Until we come to realize that truly each person is part of the Divine Expression we will look for greater and lesser beings to ourselves. This understanding of the Divine heritage in each person places us on a new plane of being, which creates an equality in the spirit and a way to meet each person on equal footing.

When this is realized we can bring a complete sincerity and truthfulness to our conversations. Mahatma Gandhi wrote to Muriel Lester: "Speak the truth, without fear and without exception, and see everyone whose work is related to your purpose. You are in God's work, so you need not fear man's scorn. If they listen to your requests and grant them you will be satisfied. If they reject them, then you must make their rejection your strength." Thurman adds that There must always be the confidence that the effect of truthfulness can be realized in the mind of the oppressor as well as the oppressed. There is no substitute for faith."

We also want to deeply understand **the omnipresence of God.**

The 139th Psalm

O' Lord, you have searched me and known me.

You know when I sit down and when I rise up;

You discern my thoughts from far away.

You search out my path and my lying down,

And are acquainted with all my ways.

Even before a word is on my tongue,

O Lord, you know it completely. . .

Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there;

If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning

And settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

Even there your hand shall lead me,

And your right hand shall hold me fast.

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,

And the light around me become night."

Even the darkness is not dark to you;
The night is as bright as the day,
For darkness is as light to you

Third is the **principle of Self-determination** which is our use of the Creative Power of God as we individualize it to our lives.

Howard Thurman wrote:

“Jesus recognized with authentic realism that anyone who permits another to determine the quality of his inner life gives into the hands of the other the keys to his destiny. If a man knows precisely what he can do to you or what epithet he can hurl against you in order to make you lose your temper, your equilibrium, then he can always keep you under subjection. It is a man’s reaction to things that determines their ability to exercise power over him. . . The solution which Jesus found for himself and for Israel, as they faced the hostility of the Greco-Roman world, becomes the word and the work of redemption for all the cast-down people in every generation and in every age. I mean this quite literally.”

Finally the ideal of **community**: In 1967, a year in which disturbances rocked cities from Detroit to Newark, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. asked, in his fourth and final book: “Where do we go from here? Chaos or community?” His answer, of course, was community — a beloved community grounded in human dignity, nonviolent social change and the defeat of poverty, racism and militarism. We are called again today to answer his question.