

Isaiah 11:6-9

⁶ The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.

⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. ⁹ They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Matthew 18:21-35

²¹ Then Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' ²² Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.'

²³ 'For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵ and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow-slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, "Pay what you owe." ²⁹ Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." ³⁰ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow-slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³² Then his lord summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?" ³⁴ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt. ³⁵ So my heavenly Lord will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'

For Reflection:

You will know you are on a true reconciliation journey if it is messy and complicated; beautiful and transformational.

-Brenda Salter McNeil

Jesus is the center of our faith; community, the center of our life; reconciliation, the center of our work. And so we turn for one final time to the work of reconciliation, to the center place of our work.

Let's pray together. God of love, God who renews all things, we come before you now – make us aware of your Spirit's presence among us, of where your Spirit is moving in us, moving through us and moving with us, forming us into your people. Amen.

Marian Franz, the long-time director of the Peace Tax Fund, tells the story of one of her early interactions upon arriving in our nation's capital in the late 1960s.¹ She was there because Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) was opening a Washington D.C. office for the first time, adding to its relief and development to now include advocacy and justice work at the political level.

Early into her time in D.C. she was invited to attend a dinner at the Church of the Savior located downtown. At the dinner table, she introduced herself to the person sitting beside her, "Hello, I'm Marian Franz."

"Hello, I'm Bill Price." Replied the man sitting next to her.

¹ Marian recalls this story in the book *Godward*, published by Herald Press.

The she proceeded to ask one of our typical “get-to-know-you” questions: “What do you do, Bill?”

“I’m the highest ranking civilian at the Pentagon,” he explained. “I’m director of the United States Air Force Office of Scientific Research, which works on laser beam weaponry for the air force.”

To this, Marian drew “back in shock. Emitting a loud gasp, I blurted, ‘How could you? Those weapons kill people!’”

Her astonishment astonished Bill. He was used to quite a different response to questions about his career. Usually people were impressed with his high position, showing due difference, and praise for such a role. He was curious about her astonishment.

Bill courteously explained he was proud he had bought a new system of management to his department at the Pentagon. As a result the department was running more efficiently.

Marian tried to offer some praise, “Having an office work efficiently is generally commendable,” she said, but then persisted in refocusing the conversation on the victims of such efficiency. “how can you be involved in taking the lives of others in such a calculating manner? Those are real people – parents, babies, teenagers, the elderly, God’s children – at the other end of those weapons.”

As someone who does not like conflict or tension, I imagine that if I were at that table, I would have been extraordinarily uneasy, hoping that this new D.C. resident would just keep her opinions to herself, or at least a bit more veiled. I can hardly imagine being that bold with my own family member or close friend, let alone someone I had just met (I think this is why this

story intrigues me so much, in some ways it represents a piece of who I wish I could be – that I wish I had such daily boldness). But, I believe what Marian was doing, was simply being who she was as a follower of Jesus – that her love of God and people, it simply flowed out of her – her shock was bigger than her sense of cultural niceties. She was not trying to make a huge public display, rather for her, this is how she lived as a person of reconciliation. Reconciliation, of which I know for me, will (and has) at times come at the expense of my own comfort. As it says in the “For Reflection” at the bottom of our bulletins, “we will know we are on a true reconciliation journey if it is messy and complicated; beautiful and transformational.”²

At the time of writing down that story, Marian Franz noticed that” after more than twenty-five years in the nation’s capital, I have long since lost that original sense of shock when people calmly defend their military activities. Yet for the sake of the victims of military violence, should we not remain scandalized?” The ancient prophets never became accustomed to wrong. They were not callous to their own callousness. Be shocked! Be appalled at this!

How do we daily keep ourselves living as people of reconciliation – how do we live and sustain ourselves as people of daily reconciliation?

Civil Rights leader Ruby Sales says, “Love is not antithetical to being outraged. Let’s be very clear about that. And love is not antithetical to anger. There are two kinds of anger. There’s redemptive anger, and there’s non-redemptive anger. And so redemptive anger is the anger that

² From Lisa Salter McNeil, in her book *Roadmap to Reconciliation*.

moves us to transformation and human up-building.”³ Non-redemptive anger is the anger that revenge is rooted in; non-redemptive anger seeks to blame and scapegoat others; non-redemptive anger seeks to return hurt with hurt, pain for pain, eye for eye. But, as Gandhi reminded us, “an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.” So we have to make a distinction. If you are like me, you have generally come to believe that anger is a bad emotion. I do not want to be a person of anger – I do not want to respond in anger, in fact I have worked to root much anger out of my life (though, it still shows up on occasion).

But what Ruby Sales is talking about here is what some call “Prophetic Grief” or “Prophetic Anger”, the anger that moves us to action – to sustained action. Anger at injustice, anger that makes us stand-up and say, “this cannot be.” And I think this is something that some like me who have grown-up Mennonite do not do well, that somehow in our communal emphasis we have sort of communicated that anger is bad and should be avoided. This has both positive and negative implications, one of the negatives being that people like myself who have this underlying fear of anger (or view that anger is a bad emotion), we can struggle to be sustained in our work for justice because we don’t let ourselves be angry – even angry at injustice. Avoiding anger can keep us from sustaining this work because the work of reconciliation, it must be personal. I have come to the current working position for myself that the justice and advocacy work that I will be engaged in, that it must be personal. I think this is truly the only way to sustain the work over the long-haul, if it is, or has become personal. If it is not personal – if I do not have some prophetic anger about an issue or situation – then it is just going to be an issue, an issue I will help with until the next issue comes along. And I will just jump from issue to issue.

³ This quote comes from her interview with Krista Tippett on the radio program “On-Being.”

And in some ways this is okay, we need people to show-up. But for something to be sustained over the long-run, I believe it must be personal. So, I have decided that if I am going to be advocating for something, then I also need to personally be doing something about it – that I won't just expect the government, local or national, to take care of everything – I, we (or other groups that I am a part of), we too must be working toward that change, working toward new life, toward the reconciliation of all things. So if I am going to be advocating for keeping of DACA⁴, I am also asking, what I am doing to help welcome and support immigrants? If I am going to push the city for more affordable housing, then what I (or we) doing for those without housing? And, if I am going to cry out for non-violent solutions to terrorism and North Korea, then I ask myself, “how I am working for peace.” If I am going to write letters about prison reform, then we and groups that I am joined with must also be working for alternatives to locking people up. Or, if I am seeking to get Congress and the White House to open their eyes to the continued Climate-related disasters taking place in our country and our world this very week, then what I am doing (what are we doing) to live climate solutions.

It must be personal. That is one of the ways we will know that we are doing the work that we have been called to, when it is personal. What is your work to do will likely not feel personal to me and visa-versa.

And of course, it is a tricky balance of having things be personal, and still being people who are open to the God of infinite love – to be people of ‘Prophetic anger’ and ‘unlimited forgiveness’ –

⁴ Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. This is a program that legally protects undocumented immigrants who arrived to the United States as children - they have only known the USA as their home.

this is, I think, the paradoxical place where Jesus calls us to live (at least, this is my working theory).

Being people of such *a peculiar paradox* takes practice and regular reminders. I have shared before that most mornings, as I am getting ready to leave the house, I pray repeatedly “God, help me be a person of love today; help me be a person of love today.” And there are times when this carries me through much of the day, and other times when it only carries me for a few moments. There are times at Corpus Christi House (our homeless day shelter in Boise) there are times when I am there and I can feel myself starting to harden – a sign is when someone is sharing a bit of their hardship with me, in search of getting help, and I think to myself “this can’t be the truth.” Another sign is when I am around town and I read the cardboard sign of someone I know, and think “I know you are not a stranded traveler.” These are moments when I know that I am hardening, that I am forgetting that most of our homeless citizens are working from a survival mentality – that they are literally living from a place of daily survival, a place that I have never been and hope to never be. If I am able to recognize this hardening in myself, this is when I have to take a little stronger step of action and turn to an old move that my wrestling coach taught me – as a profoundly passionate person who could show great love and great judgment – thus he told me that his daily prayer is this, “God turn my heart of stone into a heart of flesh.” Turn my heart of stone into a heart of flesh. And so, there are times when I require this prayer as I seek to try to remain open to the peculiar paradox of reconciliation – to the God of infinite love and infinite justice – God, turn my heart of stone into a heart of flesh. Turn my heart of stone into a heart of flesh.

Civil Rights veteran Ruby Sales takes this even one step further in working to keep her heart open – in keeping her ability to love, and thus to continue to the work of reconciliation to which she has been called. She recalls a defining moment for her that happened when she was getting her hair done one morning, and while this was happening her hairdresser’s daughter came in after being out all night – she saw the sores on her body from repeated drug use. And she said, that something inside of her nudged her to ask, “Where does it hurt?” And so she said, “Shelley, where does it hurt?” And that simple and profound question allowed her to open-up and share things she had never shared before.

But imagine how else that could have gone. A young-woman comes in from being out all night, doing only God-knows-what, and for most of us our instinct would move to seeing her through the eyes of judgment – a quick thought of easy judgment, of “what is wrong with you?” or “I know what you’ve been up to.” And so this is a question that Ruby Sales continues to use as she works from a place of both prophetic anger and transformative love, of seeing the other, of remaining open instead of asking the questions of judgment and predetermination, so she asks the question that reconciling love requires of us all, “Where does it hurt? Where does it hurt?” Think of the ways this might change how we see others, especially those with whom we vehemently disagree or struggle with – where does it hurt?⁵

⁵ Ruby Sales also tells this story in her “On-Being” interview with Krista Tippet. The interview can be found at <https://onbeing.org/programs/ruby-sales-where-does-it-hurt-aug2017/>

Marian Franz says that she had pretty much forgotten about that meal she had in her first months in D.C., largely forgotten until she heard an interview that had been with Bill Price. You see, within a year of that interaction, Bill Price resigned his position and left the Pentagon. With others at their church, he and his wife founded *World Peacemakers*, an organization aimed at helping congregations build local peacemaking groups. Bill was interviewed by a student group, who asked him, “We know you used to work at the Pentagon. Why did you quit?”

To which Bill replied, “Let me tell you what contributed to my change, one evening in the late 60s, I was having dinner at my church. There was a woman new to D.C. who was sitting beside me...”

One of the impacts of living her life as a person of daily reconciliation. And so, may we be a people who live into that peculiar paradox of infinite love and transformative anger; a people attending to the daily work of restoring all things into right relationship. Amen and amen.