

The way of the Cross – Tino Todino 1st November 2015

Introduction

John 12:24

23 But Jesus answered them, saying, “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. 24 Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. 25 He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honour.

There is a natural cycle of seasons that take place in nature each year in which we see seeds planted, growth, fruit (and more seed), and then death before the cycle takes place again. I have come to understand and believe that this natural cycle of which we are all familiar is also true for things the spiritual realm. In order for us to be able to bear fruit we must first be willing for our ‘grain of wheat’ to fall into the ground and die. In fact, I believe that for any transformational change to take place there has to be a process by which we die to an old way of being in order to be reborn into a new way of being.

Key Point: There has to be a time when a seed stops being a seed (through death), germinates and becomes a plant with new life (resurrection).

We see this in the ultimate transformation in Christ who in the way of the cross was the persecuted victim of the forces of empire and religion (Pilate and Caiaphas) but was vindicated by the Father through resurrection as the risen Lord of all.

Our first experience of this transformational change of death and resurrection takes place when we are Born Again (or Born Anew). We recognise that something in us changed the moment we believed with our hearts and confessed with our mouths the Lordship of Jesus in our lives. The old man or woman died, and we became a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), with a new nature, and a new desire, to follow the Lord Jesus even unto death. We moved into a way of being and identity that is centred in the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul calls this ‘in Christ’.

What we fail to recognise however, is that the initial born again or born anew experience is meant to be only the first of many times in our lives that the process of death and resurrection occurs. We might call this process by other terms like:

- Revival
- Renewal
- Putting off and putting on
- Laying down and taking up

But at its heart is the same root image of dying as (or to) one thing to be reborn as another, and this is portrayed many times in the New Testament scripture and is what I want to talk about as a natural spiritual process that affects change in us, our culture, our community and our world.

Key Point: **Death and rebirth are an integral part of a healthy spiritual walk with the Lord.**

The way of the cross – death and resurrection

In the gospels we read about Jesus teaching that the path to new life was through death. He spoke of us 'taking up our cross and following Him'. Long before that phrase was used as a loose metaphor for putting up with a difficult relative or situation the cross was a symbol of execution and death. Literally, a death sentence. To follow Jesus and take up ones cross was a commitment to the way of death in order to grasp hold of the hope of resurrection. In Mark's gospel (from chapter 8 through to chapter 10) we see three times that Jesus spoke of His impending Death and Resurrection. For Him it was a proclamation of what would take place, for us a metaphor for personal and corporate transformation.

When Paul resolved to "preach nothing but Christ and Christ crucified" this is most centrally what he meant: the cross as a symbol of the process of personal transformation at the heart of the Christian life. He speaks of baptism as symbolic of the same thing. That our old nature is put to death in the waters of baptism and the new person empowered with God's nature arises in its place.

Romans 6:1- 4

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Do you see it yet? That the way of the cross involves dying to an old identity and being reborn into a new identity, dying to an old way of being and being raised to a new way of being, one centred in God.

So in order to see a personal transformation, we must recognise what in our lives needs to be put to death in order that Christ might make us more like Him. Things like:

- Fear
- Self-centredness
- Mistrust
- Pride
- Violence
- Control
- Manipulation

So, to see a cultural shift, we must put to death the parts of the old culture:

- Judgmental Attitudes - Them and Us (comparison, separation/segregation/In and out) – **Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18)**
 - Male/Female
 - Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
- False Expectations of others - blame and offence
- Cynicism
 - We've tried that – it won't work.
- Nostalgia
 - Stop harping on about the past. God is not working in our past, but in our present.
- Hierarchy and control
 - We are all equal in the body of Christ. There is no hierarchy as we are all 'in Christ'.
 - My gift blend and calling is not better than yours, it's just unique (as is yours).
 - You and I are of incomprehensible value to the Lord. And so is everyone else you will ever meet

Why is this death/rebirth cycle necessary?

It is necessary in order to be fruitful in our lives and become who God always intended for us to be in communion with Him. Going back to the original verse, we want to produce 'much grain'. The only way to do this is through this cycle whilst we are connected with Him and each other. **It is also the only way we can be truly transformed into His likeness**

Key Point: Death and life happen when we are in relationship and communion with God.

Rebirth always signified by 4 things: freedom, joy, peace and love.

Freedom from the voices of all the other would be lords of our lives

Joy – the joy of the exuberant life – (Energy, excitement, cheerfulness)

Peace – the reconnection to the prince of peace, the peace that passes all understanding

Love – the love of God for us and in us. This is the greatest sign.

The root of a life centred in God, in the Spirit results in the fruit of Christ-like love. **The primary quality of a life in the Spirit is love and it is a genuine marker for genuine spirituality.**

The scriptures talk many times of newness and of freshness:

New songs, new day, new start, new hope, new mercy, new possibilities, new ideas, new ways, new people, God says "new heaven and a new earth," "new covenant," "new self," "new heart," "new command," "new creation" ... new, new, new!

The way of the cross – Intentionality in Spiritual practices

The process of rebirth is a work of the Spirit. It was when we were originally born again and continues to be when we allow God to change us through this cycle. I don't think we can force ourselves to birth new things, but I do believe we can midwife the process. Spirituality is midwifery – It is the intentional engaging in connection with God and others so as to prepare yourself for rebirth.

Marcus Borg writes:

'By practice I mean all the things Christians do together and individually as a way of **paying attention to God**. They include being part of a Christian community, a church, and taking part in its life together as community. They include worship, collective deeds of hospitality and compassion and being nourished by Christian community. They include devotional disciplines, especially prayer and spending time with the Bible and they include loving what God loves through the practice of compassion and justice in the world'. (Marcus Borg – the heart of Christianity)

These spiritual practices are not a list of requirements. Rather they are for the deepening of our life with God and our love for God and each other.

Challenge: Be a spiritual midwife. Commit yourself to the practice of communion with God in which you submit to the process of death and rebirth. Then give yourself the permission to be a vessel that God can use to do something new!