

Bimal Thambyah, May 7, 2017

An invisible thread...only connects

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, our strength and our redeemer.

Amen.

Victor Rajaratnam, one of my High School teachers told us in class one day -
"Christianity is not a Religion, it is a way of life."

I have often thought about what he said. You may want to comment on this later on during worship. Christians during the early days were part of the synagogue.

The people were called people of The Way... I was brought up Methodist, but only later I found out that we were really a kind of breakaway group from the Anglicans. John Wesley was an Anglican priest. I think that Menno Simons was a Roman Catholic Priest.

My understanding is that the name Christian was a derogative term – which eventually stuck.

I will start my reflection with two rather silly jokes...

Jack goes to the doctor and says that he is not feeling well .

The doctor replies, "There is nothing wrong with you, Jack, it's all in your mind." He goes again a month later and gets the same response.

This happens a few more times. About six months later Jack's wife, Jane, goes to see the Doctor with a complaint of her own. The doctor asks what's up with your partner, Jack - "I haven't seen him in awhile". Jane replies, "Jack thinks he is dead!"

It's all in your mind or is it?

Two rabbinical students feel the need to do penance so they go to their teacher for advice. The Rabbi says "put a dozen peas in your shoes every morning before you wear them for week." During the week, one of the students sees the other walking with no discomfort at all – naturally he is curious and accuses the other – "hey you have broken the promise to the Rabbi" – the other says, "No problem – I boiled them first!" ***A question of interpretation – or is it?***

Paul writing to the Christians in Corinth – **1 Corinthians 14:20 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**

1 Corinthians 14:20 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

20 Brothers and sisters do not be children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults.

I volunteered to speak this morning, because I have been thinking a lot about my faith. So what I am going to say in the next ten minutes or so will be very subjective. As you may know – I turned seventy. It's kind of embarrassing when someone offers me a seat in the Metro or worse calls me Sir! It's not that long ago that I was having fun playing soccer during our picnics and even scoring goals.

All the above was kind of an introduction to my reflection:

So what is the Christian Faith all about – is it about me?

Of course not!

Is it about you, any of you? – I do not think so either!

Is it about Jesus? I do not think so...!

Just in case you are wondering ...how come he doesn't get struck down by lightning for saying a thing like that in a Mennonite Church of all places? Let me ask the most important question – is the Christian Faith about God? The answer to this question is a one hundred percent yes. God so loved that he gave...

And when we say no to Jesus we are actually saying no to God's initiative. God so loved that he gave... Obviously many people who have been brought up in a Church culture like myself have rejected this for whatever reason. This automatically begs the question – what about sin?! To me the real sin is in the singular.

I think if we do not understand sin in the singular we will be at a loss to deal with sins in the plural. The sin is saying no to God's initiative. What do I mean? Just suppose I was desperately hungry and I steal bread. Stealing is wrong, it is a sin – but it becomes a theological problem for us. If we ask the question, whose sin is it anyway? ...is it solely mine? It very quickly becomes a complex issue.

You see God so loved the world and not just the Church.

So I really believe that we have the responsibility to proclaim God's initiative to everyone.

I am sure many will question my line of thought...

How about people of other Faiths and so on?

For people who come from my part of the world, Gandhi is an iconic figure. A famous theologian from my parents' generation, Visser 't Hooft was asked the question: " if Gandhi was a Christian would he have done what he did – differently? Visser 't Hooft's answer was- Gandhi would have done the same but he would have thought about what he did differently.

<https://archive.org/stream/upontheearththem013276mbp#page/n131/mode/2up/search/Gandhi>

In the sixties, if you are old enough to remember - a book called Honest to God by Bishop John Robinson made quite an impact – It was, I am sure, a best seller .

My uncle, D.T.Niles wrote a book in response called "We Know in Part" as a riposte.

Here is a small quote from his book - *"...it is not enough to speak of the obligation to love and meeting the obligations of love as if we know what it means. It is essential in one's life to hold this command to love in conjunction with the command to believe in Jesus Christ. How is it that we can talk about faith in Jesus Christ?*

It is because a group of men and women who encountered the Christ event were captured by it and declared that in it was the paradigm by which all of life was to be explained... religion says Karl Barth is perhaps a "private matter" - but here we are talking about Faith not Religion."

In my opinion, these days, we cannot and dare not tell other people how to behave. It is simply a total waste of time and energy. But what we can do though is to have a good look at our own lives. After I completed my training in England in 1973, I spent about three months taking it easy. In my neighbourhood there was an American Missionary from Worldwide Evangelical Crusade - his wife was English. One day, he, Marlon Summers, told me something in passing - it was something like - we have to "rise above ". It has taken pretty much all my life up to now to really understand what this means. I once wrote a small piece, which went - "how can we rise like angels when we are living with a bunch of turkeys!" That was definitely a low point in my life when I was living in a rooming house downtown.

I want to spend sometime with the words "rising above" in a Christian sense. It is quite different to the rather overworked expression - "positive thinking." In my way of thinking - positive thinking, with no attention to detail quickly becomes living in denial.

Let me try to explain. You may have to boil my ideas before you put them in your shoes.

In Quebec, people like myself are called - old bachelors - (vieux garçon) - we are kind of the "been there and done that group!" In my building there are a few. Some of them gather around their electric bikes in the summer. They are bikers but there is no crime involved. I haven't joined yet - but I am tempted.

As an old bachelor living in a penthouse apartment with arguably the best view in town - what would transpire if the right person knocked on my door with some samosas and red wine - a Scottish friend of mine used to say champagne and porridge for breakfast. Well one can always dream - it is allowed. Just in case you think that I am being rather risqué on a Sunday morning - go home and read your Bible from cover to cover. Especially the bits you were not old enough to learn when you were children.

All through history there have been many people who's witness has been that this book has been an inspiration to them... I knew only one grandparent, my dad's

mother. She did not read English, but she had this huge Tamil Bible... her favourite book in the Bible was... Lamentations, I was a kid I never figured out why... but at seventy and looking back at our family history I can make a more learned guess... hindsight is definitely 20/ 20!

I like to bring my meditation to a close -

As I mentioned to you before – I turned seventy last year in August. Although I have gone to Church regularly all my life in Sri Lanka, the U.K and Canada, I only started praying in a disciplined way in the last fifteen years. Up until then, I pretty much ran on my own steam.

One thing I do regularly is Christian meditation, which was introduced to Montreal by the late John Main, a Benedictine monk.

A couple of years ago, I came across the name Richard Rhor, a Franciscan Monk, in the Canadian Mennonite magazine. I also discovered from the Internet that his style is very similar to John Main.

In one of his talks he used words from the Psalms “be still and know that I am God.”

Psalm 46:10 King James Version (KJV)

10 Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.

So let us pray, in the same style as Richard Rhor:

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know

Be still

Be

Amen.