

The Sermon - In 10 Sentences or Less

It's Up to You (Week 6) - I feel overwhelmed and helpless in the face of the world's evil and pain:



1) The question of the day was - I'm overwhelmed by all the pain and evil in the world. I feel powerless to make a difference - help!

2) All of us, off and on, and from one degree to another, experience this: at the very least, our species' capacity to create and distribute information now greatly exceeds our ability to cope with it.

3) We look at this vital, complex question from four angles yesterday, none complete in and of themselves, the first of which was "The world is not ours to save."

4) We who care deeply about the just and good causes of God for the sake of all people run the risk of thinking that the future of the world hangs on our own efforts, when in fact the arc of the universe belongs to God alone, and the only durable answer to the question of long-term hope is Him.

5) The 2nd important component in a biblically-informed answer is - we live in a world that's in process, a slow and sure one at that (see Matthew 13.31-33), which means we will experience a world full of both pain and promise, hardship and hope, lament and love.

6) This in fact is how God Himself experiences our cosmos, so as we grow more and more into His likeness, we should expect the same: He cares deeply for a world that is not yet as it should and will be, for, as poet Allen Ginsberg put it, "the weight of the world is love."

7) The 3rd angle from which we responded to yesterday's question is - "Our task to imagine where God is taking the world in Christ, and pull that hope into the present tense."

8) Jesus' own ministry was one of expanding our moral, relational, and spiritual imagination, breaking out of our all-too-predictable human loops.

9) As we imagine the world as it will be when Christ, as St. Paul puts it, manages it like a well-run household (Eph. 1.9-10, and the word "plan"), we as Christians can offer the present world the fresh insight and stinging critique of the world to come.

10) The 4th and last way to come at this question is - "We cannot do everything everywhere, nor should we try, but we can do something somewhere."

Quotes To Chew On

- 1) Cynthia Rigby (Professor of Theology, Austin Presbyterian Seminary):

Live with the reality of God's world in mind, and this world will become something new. When we are imagining a world in which weeping will be no more, we work even harder to alleviate suffering. When we are imagining a world in which all injustices are resolved, we ask ourselves hard questions about everything...When we are picturing a wolf and a lamb eating side by side, we cannot help but think differently about violence and war...The movement cannot be from here to there...Rather, the gospel invites us to start from there, and see what happens...So I ask again – Can you imagine?

- 2) Bruce Reyes-Chow (PCUSA pastor, in his book "In Defense of Kindness"):

When you see traumatic situations...it is hard not to shift into rescuer or savior mode. Those of us who grew up in countries that have a history of colonizing others are afflicted with a kind of hangover that often reveals itself in times of disaster or tragedy. With good intentions, we jump right in and attempt to rescue, fix, or save those who are in pain. However, these 'good intentions' are clouded by the assumption that we know best how to respond...We one-dimensionalize, assume a lack of agency, and generally treat those in tragedy as eager recipients of any help that we can offer, whether or not our help is actually wanted or indeed helpful.

Kindness that is fueled by guilt, pity, or leftover colonialism is not kindness at all...When attempting to help others, real kindness compels us to see the other as a complex human with agency and perspective, just like we are. It allows us to ask what is needed, provide support that is healthy, and enter into a relationship that is not patronizing or transactional in nature.

- 3) Episcopalian rector Becca Stevens, writing for the Center for Action and Contemplation:

We have to do small things and believe a big difference is coming. It's like the miraculous drops of water that seep through mountain limestone, then gather themselves into springs that flow into creeks that merge into rivers that find their way to the ocean. Our work is to envision our drops as oceans. We do our small parts and know a powerful ocean...is downstream.

For This Week

1) Use some of the key sentences from yesterday's sermon daily in your own prayer life this week, or as the focus on your meditation or centering/breathing prayer. Let them ground you, stretch or expand you, comfort you, and challenge you:

- "The world is not ours to save."
- "Only God can answer the question of hope."
- "The cosmos is in process, and is yet to be completed."
- "Help me imagine how Jesus would run the world."
- "I cannot do everything everywhere, but I can do something somewhere."
- "We do our small parts and know a powerful ocean...is downstream."

2) If applicable, ask God to show you what your something somewhere is. Come back to that several times over the week, and then see by week's end if you have any more clarity about that sense of calling or focus.

3) So how can we cope better with a world that is so overwhelming on occasion? Here are some practical articles about that:

- [What to Do When You're Overwhelmed by the World](#)
- [Feeling overwhelmed by world events? Treat yourself the way you would a friend](#)
- [When the State of the World Overwhelms You](#)

4) A book recommendation - cited in the sermon:

[In Defense of Kindness: Why It Matters, How It Changes Our Lives, and How It Can Save the World: Reyes-Chow, Bruce](#)