

October 4, 2020

Carol's Reflection on the patience of a hope or an idea

Lanny, the title character of the novel by Max Porter says:

"Which do you think is more patient, an idea or a hope?"

As I discussed this with some dear friends with whom I had gone to school, we were a bit stymied.

An idea? Well certainly ideas can be persistent – I can't get that out of my head...has been said on more than one occasion. But are ideas patient?

What about a hope? Hope is one of the things that abides in that famous passage from Corinthians –

Now faith, hope and love abide, these three, and the greatest of these is love...

Is abiding or lasting the same thing as being patient?

"Which do you think is more patient, an idea or a hope?"

After our ZOOM conversation had concluded, one friend sent a note about the image of a handprint in the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela. It is the creation of an idea of being connected with the saints who had gone before, and the idea of following a path to faith and to God. Dutch author Cees Nooteboom wrote:

"At the entrance to the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela there is a marble column with deep impressions of fingers, an emotional, expressionistic claw created by millions of hands, including my own. But it is already a distortion to say "including my own", for in grasping that pillar I have never felt the emotion that comes after walking for more than a year to arrive. I was not a man of the Middle Ages, I was not a believer, I arrived by car. If you disregard my hand resting on the marble, had I never been in that place, the claw would still be there, eroded in the hard stone by the fingers of all those people now dead. Yet, by laying my hand in that hollow one I was participating in a collective work of art.

An idea becomes visible in matter: that is always wondrous.

The power of an idea impelled kings, peasants, monks to lay their hands on exactly that spot on the column; each successive hand removed the minutest particle of marble so that, precisely where the marble had been erased, a negative hand became visible"

The patience of an Idea.

And then I was back to hope, and the poetry of Emily Dickinson:

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all –

Again, it is the question: “Which do you think is more patient, an idea or a hope?”

The Gospel story is about patience, and persistence, and about an idea and a hope. It is about God’s idea and hope. It is about God’s persistence and patience.

The parables that we have right now are told in Matthew’s Gospel as if it is Holy Week. Jesus has entered Jerusalem on a donkey – the people filled the streets waving the branches from Palm trees. He has gone to the temple and overturned the tables of the money changers – He quoted “It is written My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers.”

He has healed the blind and the lame – right there and then.

And, then, the chief priests and the elders of the people ask “By what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority?”

And, it is in response to this question that the parables are told. Last week it was the story of the 2 sons. This week, it is the middle parable, one called the ‘parable of the wicked tenants’.

As the vineyard owner sends first slaves and then his son to collect the harvest, the tenants kill each one. The Jesus asks the question – what do you think will happen when the vineyard owner arrives? The listeners say the tenants will be thrown out. And then, as almost always happens with Jesus – he does not agree. He does not say – you’re right. Instead, he quotes more Scripture – The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, this was the Lord’s doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.

And that gives us even more questions – who are the builders? What is rejected?

Perhaps the builders are the tenants, and their rejection of the son would fit with our idea that the life of Jesus is the cornerstone of our Christian faith.

Or

Perhaps the builders are the ideas that the tenants hold – particularly the idea that the world operates only by consequences of rejection and punishment, and the stone that is rejected is love – the idea of justice. And when we fall on this stone, if we reject love and justice, we ourselves are broken.

Perhaps the story is another invitation by Jesus for people to repent. People are called to turn away from all the unjust workings of the world that mean lots for some and none for others. People are invited to live by God's love and justice.

This could be a story about the patience of God's idea and God's hope.

The Kingdom of God is not about consequences of 'deserve'. The Kingdom of God is about grace. And love.

The Kingdom of God is a hope and an idea of which we are invited to participate.

And both are patient beyond words.