

Order Disorder Reorder

Fr Richard Rohr, the wonderfully insightful Franciscan priest, talks about spiritual transformation as a process of "Order, Disorder and Reorder."

Now, before you nod off or head for that cup of coffee, bear with me for a moment!

Because this process is what lies at the heart of our gospel lesson today, and this process can be a key to our own metanoia, our own entering into the "larger mind of God."

We see this process, "Order, Disorder and Reorder," at work with the Pharisees this morning.

Now, first things first!

Who are the Pharisees?

What surprised our Bible Study group and what may surprise you too is that the Pharisees aren't clergy!

They aren't priests.

They aren't ordained.

They were very much the liberal democrats of their day.

The Pharisees were lay people who saw their calling as trying to help ordinary folks live by, learn about, and follow, the Law of Moses.

They were particularly dedicated to this mission because they believed that if every Jew followed the law for just one day, the Messiah would come.

And when Messiah comes, there will be peace, prosperity and joy in the land.

So the Pharisees' motivation to get everyone on the same train is very high indeed.

That's the scene unfolding in our gospel this morning.

The Pharisees are pushing the need to be ritually clean; which means washing their hands and bowls and cups, and minding what they eat.

The original point to all that isn't about germs.

It's to remind folks that being clean is an "inside-out" job: and we use "outside-in" rituals as a reminder.

Except, like most humans, the Pharisees downplay the real meaning of the ritual.

After all, they're trying to get everyone on board for just a day!

And so the ritual that is supposed to help people to remember that real cleanliness starts on the inside, becomes a ritual that's focused on the appearance of things, not the truth of things.

That's the Order that Jesus walks into.

And Jesus, as Jesus does, immediately creates Disorder!

By reminding the folks that the real point of the ritual is this: become on the outside who you are on the inside.

And to become clean on the inside, we need to examine ourselves.

We need to challenge ourselves.

It's what 12 step groups call the 4th and 5th steps.

The church calls it confession.

That painstaking examination of self to look hard at my love affairs with judgment and envy and greed and gluttony and all the rest.

To own it.

Then to share it with another person, because in the sharing, the power these things once had over me slowly disappears.

That's the Disorder Jesus creates.

Reminding them, and us, that every outward ritual, if it's lost touch with it's inside meaning, is not just a waste of time, it's a blasphemy.

Like the folks who show up to mass for the communion wafer, while hating poor folks.

Like standing outside a church and holding up a Bible, while having no idea what's in that Bible, or making any effort to live by its truths.

But once we do the hard work to reclaim the inner meaning, we are then Reordered - changed - even, transformed.

Funny thing, just as soon as Jesus takes the Pharisees through this spiritual process of change, of "Order, Disorder and Reorder," Jesus himself is taken through the same process when he's confronted with the Canaanite woman with a sick daughter!

Jesus walks into the scene with his own "Order" in mind.

He's focused on the Jewish people because the Jews are God's chosen people.

Not because they are good or adorable or exceptional, but because they are nobodies.

They're a small group of former slaves, with nothing wonderful or compelling about them at all.

But these are the kinds of folks that are the apple of God's eye.

Jesus knows that.

That's his "Order."

Until this stubborn, loving, frightened, insightful, foreign woman confronts Jesus.

She's a nobody too.

Nothing special at all.

And in her challenge to Jesus to pay attention to her cry for help for the daughter whom she loves, she brings Disorder to our Lord!

A "Disorder" that makes him take another look at what he thought to be his mission — and as he comes through the Disorder, our Lord himself ends up examining himself.

What a different view this gives us of God — especially those who think of God as Plato and Aristotle did: all knowing, all powerful, and never changing.

Instead, this story reminds us that the God of the Jewish people, and the God of Christian people, is not that God.

Rather, our God is the one who stands with Abraham and changes his mind about how many righteous people will keep Sodom from being destroyed.

He is the God Moses argues with when God is furious at the stubbornness of his people.

He is the God the prophets entreat for mercy and justice and forgiveness.

And here is our God in the flesh — being schooled — by a foreign woman no less.

And in the schooling, Jesus himself is Reordered — as he sees her, for the first time, as a child of God — because she is nothing special.

Because she is a nobody.

Because for God, those are the folks who are the apple of God's eye.

And while every Sunday we read just a bit of Matthew's gospel, Jesus' schooling doesn't end here.

Right after this encounter with the Canaanite woman, like a bookend to his feeding of the 5000 Jews that happened two weeks ago, Jesus feeds 4000 Gentiles (that's us!) with just 7 loaves and a few fish.

Jesus' "Reordering" brings his ministry out of the bubble he first operates in — and into the entire world.

Maybe we have this woman, and her chutzpah, to thank for the great command Jesus gives his disciples at the end of Matthew's gospel!

"Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this new way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Mt 28:19 (The Message).

How might we move from "Order" to "Disorder" to "Reorder"?

Isn't it happening right before our eyes these days?

As the old Order of white privilege is challenged by the Disorder of Black Lives Matter – will we live to see the day of a Reordered community where people are judged not the color of their skin, but by the content of their character?

As the relatively calm status quo of our politics over the last 40 years has been Disordered by the current occupant of the White House, a Disorder many folks wanted very badly, might we this Fall see a Reordering that brings out in all of us our better angels?

And in our personal lives, when it comes to the Order of long held grudges, wounded feelings, people unforgiven because they have no right to forgiveness, might we be willing to Disorder the lethargy that keeps us stuck in old resentments, old hurts?

Might we be willing to take a hard look at our own faults and failings, our own wounded-ness, and in the looking, Reorder our hearts and minds so that relationships are mended, hearts tended to, and the breach healed?

George Carlin observed that “the paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings but shorter tempers, wider Freeways, but narrower viewpoints.

We spend more, but have less.

We buy more, but enjoy less.”

In these chaotic times, as we move from Order to Disorder to Reorder, can we perhaps “remember to hold hands and cherish the moment?

Can we say I love you, and mean it?

Can we say a kind word and give a warm hug?

And can we remember that life isn't measured by the number of breaths we take, but by those moments that take our breath away?" Id.

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