

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

August 2010

Dearest Friends,

Before I jump into the heart of this letter, I simply have to first pause and say, “Thank you.” Thank you for your love and prayers. For being our allies. For helping spread this message as you pass it along, teach it, send your friends to us. Thank you for believing in us, and believing the best about us when doubts arise. Thank you for trusting us with your financial support. It means the world to us. You are our partners in this great venture, and we couldn’t do it without you.

I simply had to begin there, so that you hear again how grateful we are. For you.

Okay, let me now transition to what I was thinking about, and praying about for you this morning.

Over the past couple of days I’ve been on the phone, or texting, or on email, “catching up” with a number of friends and family. (I’ve been a bit unplugged this summer, and it was time for me to re-engage.) As I was reflecting back on those conversations this morning, I was struck by how many of the people close to me are going through something hard in their life right now. One just lost someone dear to them; another lost their job; a third has been slandered; a fourth is in deep marital pain; several are in real financial trouble, and a few are in physical affliction on top of it.

I suppose in one sense it has always been like this. Life comes to us in such staggering contrast – there is goodness and love, laughter and beauty. Just last night we had the most gorgeous sunset. And right there along with the goodness, almost hand-in-hand, there is heartbreak or trial or affliction. But when it is in *your* life, or the life of the ones you love, it really shakes you, doesn’t it? Thomas Paine’s line, “These are the times that try men’s souls” came to mind.

And so I was asking Jesus, “What do we need, Lord, to help us navigate these times?”

“Union with Me,” is what he replied.

Ah yes. Of course. Union with Jesus. The great resource of an unquenchable life. The secret to the Christian life.

Though I have to confess, this is not exactly my first reaction when my world or my inner life is shaken. No, I’m sorry to admit that my typical immediate reaction is something like what you see in those disaster movies when the deck of the ship heaves upward or the city streets begin to split – we panic. We flail. We all do this. The deck of our little ship suddenly lurches and we kick into whatever our particular survival mode is. (You *do* have a survival mode; please tell me you realize this. Ask your spouse or best friend what it is.) Some of us rally. Some reach for control. Some withdraw. Some grasp for the person nearest them (as the drowning always do). None of which is anything close to union with Christ.

Jesus knew life would test us so hard it would break us. He knew we needed something more steadfast to hold onto; he knew we needed an unquenchable life. And so he gave us...himself. He made us vine

and branch, created us in such a way as to be able to unite with him in reality – not just in thought, or inspiration, not just as a figure of speech, but in reality.

It is a good thing to believe in Jesus. A very good thing to obey him. An even more beautiful thing to worship him. But this is not the reality Jesus refers to when he says,

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches...apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:4-5)

Now, as Watchman Nee pointed out years ago, we *can* do many things apart from Jesus. People do it all the time. Christians as well as non-Christians. The point Jesus is trying to make is that it is fruitless. Particularly the things we do when we are tempted into survival mode. There is another way. A far better way. Which got me thinking about something I recently read in MacDonald:

But there is a reality of being in which all things are easy and plain – oneness, that is, with the Lord of Life. To pray for this is the first thing; and to the point of this prayer every difficulty hedges and directs us...Communion with God is the one need of the soul beyond all other need; prayer is the beginning of that communion, and some need is the motive of that prayer.

In other words, our pain – whatever else it might be or might do – can serve to drive us into a deeper *union* with Jesus. But it is a choice we must make.

We must first see what it is we naturally do, what our particular survival mode may be – whether it is to kick into overdrive, or blame someone, or grasp for the nearest thing that looks, if not stable, at least comforting. And we let it go. We stop it. We turn, and look for Jesus.

And then, we ask Jesus not merely for strength or comfort or wisdom, but we ask him for Himself. For a deeper union. We pray for union with Christ.

Jesus, I need you desperately. I am only a branch; you are the Vine. I need your life. I need *you*. Lord Jesus I renounce my other ways of attempting survival. I give myself over to you utterly – body, soul and spirit – to live in a deep union with you. Spirit of God, restore my union with Christ. Fill me with the Life of Jesus Christ. Deepen my union with Jesus, and keep me here in union with him.

Nothing else will see us through. Let us find a deeper union with Jesus, and in that, find his life is flowing through us. That his life has become our life.

Hoping this helps,


John