

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

May 2011

Dearest Allies,

A few weeks ago I was travelling in Slovakia and Poland, speaking on this beautiful Gospel. Being a tea drinker in the morning (I gave up coffee years ago) my wonderful host offered me an herbal tea I had never seen before. “These are the yellow flowers we saw in the fields this morning.” He went on to explain that most Slovaks collect herbs and dry them, making their own teas from knowledge passed down for generations. I looked up, and there across the top shelf of the kitchen were jar after jar of various dried herbs and flowers.

I thought, you have got to be kidding me. This is so 15th century. Who in the world has time to wander in the fields collecting plants, then carefully dry them to make their own herbal teas? It was a very disruptive experience.

This is not a story about going back to nature, by the way. Not even about tea.

Years ago when Brent and I were writing *The Sacred Romance*, one of the thoughts we were most deeply struck by was how our souls in this post-modern world have grown so thin, so “light,” so insubstantive and therefore so vulnerable to every passing wind. We called it the lack of “ontological density.” The lack of a deep groundedness of being.

Then I began to notice, in the decade that followed, the surge of the piercing/tattooing movement. It wasn’t just for fringe folk anymore; housewives and pastors were lining up, willing to subject themselves to pain in order to make a statement about personal identity – and, I think, also try and give themselves a sense of permanence (a tattoo is a very permanent thing.) At the same time a number of friends began to move toward more liturgical church experiences. Others started making a ritual of yoga classes. A few began to explore the “simplicity” movement. They are all reaching for the same thing: Substance. Groundedness. A deeper, denser sense of self, of being.

During this period I noticed people were also becoming much more susceptible to anxiety disorders, mental distresses, addictions multiplying like rabbits, and all sorts of vulnerability to spiritual warfare. This is the other side of the same issue: a lack of substance, groundedness. It doesn’t take much to move a feather.

Then I found myself writing a book about Jesus last fall and winter, and as I looked at his life again one of the things I was most struck by was Jesus’ ability to navigate praise, then hatred, false flattery, then adoring crowds, vicious slander and then people who simply don’t care – all with a grace and sense of self that was simply stunning. Here is one grounded man. Which brought our lack of groundedness back into stark clarity when compared to his deep, deep sense of self, identity, and substance.

We don’t have time to go into why we became – in my belief – the most ontologically light people in the history of the world. Part of it has to do with the transient culture (who lives in the same

village their grandparents did anymore?), the fragmenting of church life, the daily barrage of media on our souls, and mostly (I think) the insane pace of our lives. I barely have time to brush my teeth, let alone wander the fields picking herbs, and I couldn't do it because I don't have the knowledge passed on to me by my forefathers.

So, I felt it would be good this month to ask you: "What are you doing for groundedness?"

It better be something. And something legit, or you'll be swept away by the next strong wind, or, caught up in some silly movement looking for a sense of self.

Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32). Most folks know the last half of the verse (the truth will set you free) like they only know the second half of John 10:10. The truth doesn't set you free until you 1) know it, 2) hold fast to it, and 3) put it into regular practice. The Greek is *menos* in my *logos*; abide in, make your home in, be grounded in my embodied truth. It is *disciples*, Jesus says, who are set free by the truth. A disciple is someone on their way to groundedness.

Ours is a very experience-based age. (Another symptom of searching for a sense of self, and at the same time an erosion of it). And experience is good; we are meant to experience God and his kingdom. No experience means something deeply wrong with your Christian life. HOWEVER, we cannot base our lives on experience. That will cause you to feel like a roller coaster, like a boat at sea with no sail and no rudder.

First comes truth. We need to be grounded in it, daily. We need to know it, let it saturate our being, and then we need to put it into practice. Now yes, yes, yes – there are a host of other things we need to do for groundedness. Cut the insane busyness. Do not live for tweets, texts, Facebook or email. (I sometimes go a week or more without checking email – doesn't that sound as 15th century as collecting herbs? But who of us is more prisoner to their times?) Unplug the TV. Read Christian writers... from another century. Practice simple disciplines like solitude and silence (five minutes a day will rescue you).

But first and foremost, truth. We need souls deeply grounded in the truth. Not emotion. Not experience. Not the next song or power encounter and surely not the next Christian fad. Truth. Get back in the scriptures. Pray the Daily Prayer (found on our website, under "More" then "Prayers"). If you've never spent time in Neil Anderson's "Who I am in Christ" list of scriptures, it will ground you. (Just Google it.)

Let me ask again, "What are you doing for groundedness?" Well...what did Jesus do for groundedness? Do that.

In love,


John