



COVID – A Reorienting Moment

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Our first instinct is to say that any interference with our established pattern of normalcy represents an aberration and distraction from the true path God has for the Church and Christ-followers in being salt and light in the world. But what if the interference is really part of the journey? What if the thing we consider to be the distraction is really just another season of change that is endemic to the human condition? What if the normalcy we assumed was ideal is in fact an anesthesia of the soul that inures the people of God to the core, the heart, the essence of the good news of Jesus? What if the real path to which God has called us is really to embrace every circumstance and therein to find the reality that our citizenship really is not of this world?

COVID-19 may have caught the church off guard, but it never surprised the Kingdom of Heaven. Perhaps it is an opportunity to discover afresh the amazing grace, the expansive love, and the profound otherness of God. And, in discovering a rebirth of sorts to the nature of being God's people. It seems there are two pathways:

- a) One, to hold fast to structures that we have come to rely on as normal manifestations of the Kingdom in our organized patterns that we call church; to resist the imposition of this pandemic as a distraction, an interruption, an aberration to the freedom the people of God should experience in doing the work of church; to be steadfast in surviving the imposition and constraint it causes; to bide our time until this passes and we can get back to what we presume to be the work of God in the world. In this we tacitly conclude that the Kingdom on earth is really synonymous with the structures, systems, and mechanisms of our own devising. In other words, we grip tightly to the church we have created in our own image and likeness – structured, codified, propositional, systematized, ordered.
- b) Two, to embrace the circumstances that naturally plague a fallen humanity as part of our journey through this land all the while keeping our sights set upon the new creation which is being established on earth as in heaven. In this we accept the reality in this world of both joy and sorrow; comfort and inconvenience; structure and chaos; peace and anxiety. But our hope remains anchored in the reality of God's reign. In that we have confidence – not based upon our circumstance but upon the transcendence of the Kingdom which may still leave us in the experiences of this world until God has made all things new.

So if we embrace the circumstances, we give opportunity for the Spirit to reveal the glory of God and the abundance of salvation with a source not in our expectation or ordered world, but in the expansive love of God which transcends all circumstances and anchors us in a Kingdom not of this world.

With a disposition so inclined, there seem to be some principles that guide us as the people of God in living the Kingdom principles through our church activity. These simple thoughts form a framework to help us to live in the second option. That is, to embrace the circumstances while living out the essence of the Gospel which is not intended to be contained but broadly spread to any and all as a balm that brings pervasive hope through Jesus.

1. See the needs in the community around you. For many churches, the priority is building programs and structures to minister to the needs of the saints. There is nothing wrong with that except that the Gospel is intended to reach beyond the church. Shifting the focus of the church from its own programs to the surrounding needs starts in its shepherds. The gaze of the people of God comes into alignment with the



sightline of God who sees the need in stark contrast to the wholeness in which he has created people. God has created all people in His own image. And where that image is broken or marred, where its wholeness is being distracted or prevented – that is a need. But it takes the eyes of compassion and mercy to see. Like God, we must put on the mind of Christ, to see with the eyes of the Spirit, to allow the compassion of God for people to color our look. Jesus looked, and had compassion for he saw the need. Jesus wept.

2. Do something to meet those needs. It is not enough to see. Act. God saw the need of the human condition – and he did something. God sent Jesus to meet the need. God did not wait for our request for help. God did not wait for us to even recognize our need. Upon seeing the need of our condition as separated from Him and thus distorted, deficient, fallen, God's deep and motivating love compelled Him to act. First through the law and prophets, but in these last days through His son Jesus. God's love drove him to do something; whatever it took to meet the need. Surely, those who are full of God will have eyes to see the needs around them and with the same motivating love be compelled to move beyond the constraints of expectation or circumstance to do something to meet those needs.
3. Model collective interdependence. The people of God who are motivated by God's love and formed by the mind of Christ never act in isolated independence. Rather the Kingdom principle of mutuality becomes the hallmark of Godly, selfless, Christian action. Interdependence reveals the recognition that none of us is complete or capable alone or in our own strength. But as the hand needs the foot, so also we each need one another in fulfilling the work of the Body of Christ together. To recognize this mutuality requires both humility and vulnerability. None of us is capable – though we may selfishly believe we are. In humility we embrace our own vulnerability and deficiency causing interdependence that reflects the very mutuality of God in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
4. Anchor it in the Kingdom of Heaven. After all, our citizenship is not of this world. Our loyalty, identity, and motivation come from being born of the Spirit and fellow heirs with Jesus. As laborers for God's work, we seek to bring the Kingdom on earth as in heaven – to see the future realized in some measure right now. This is driven by the reality of hope and a future which is promised in the written word of God. So in meeting the needs of our communities we are driven by hope and anchored in the truth of the Word of God because it describes a future that is whole, complete and fulfilled as God intended creation to be. In meeting the needs of communities around us, we anchor our action in the Scripture which keeps it from becoming merely social acts of kindness. Rather, it truly invites people to a trajectory of becoming all that God intended in His creative and loving imagination. Wounds are bound up; the broken will be made whole; the fractured will be completed; there will be no more tears.

Let the Church arise; embrace the circumstance and not resist. Find in these moments the renewing freshness of the Good News of Jesus who brings the Kingdom near. Be the people of God who see the needs of our communities, do something to meet those needs, modeling the collective interdependence of the Kingdom, always anchored in God's preferred vision of His Kingdom on earth. And may God bring healing to His creation!

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