

[The following is formatted for oral delivery]

“IT IS ONLY WITH THE HEART THAT ONE CAN SEE CLEARLY, WHAT IS ESSENTIAL IS INVISIBLE TO THE EYE.” YOU MAY RECOGNIZE THAT AS THE OFT QUOTED LINE FROM *THE LITTLE PRINCE*: “IT IS ONLY WITH THE HEART THAT ONE CAN SEE CLEARLY. WHAT IS ESSENTIAL IS INVISIBLE TO THE EYE.” WHAT IN THIS CHILDREN’S CLASSIC THE LITTLE PRINCE LEARNED LATE IN HIS JOURNEY THROUGH THE WORLDS JESUS REVEALS EARLY IN HIS JOURNEY. HE NEITHER ABBROGATES THE LAW NOR TREATS THE OFT MALIGNED PHARISEES WITH CONTEMPT. HE MERELY AND PROFONDLY REMINDS US OF WHAT IS OR SHOULD BE AT THE CENTER. THE CENTER IS NOT THE OUTWARD FORMS NOR EVEN THE LAWS SO CARINGLY SET FORTH IN DEUTERONOMY...IT IS NOT EVEN THE CARE OF ORPHANS AND WIDOWS SET FORTH IN THE LETTER OF JAMES.

THE CENTER OF IT ALL ... EVEN INCLUDING AS SIMPLE A THING AS WHAT WE EAT OR DRINK ...AT THE CENTER OF IT ALL IS TO BE OUR RELATING TO GOD...OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. AND UNLESS THIS RELATING SHAPES AND FORMS WHO WE ARE ...FROM THE INSIDE OUT ... THEN WE HAVE MISSED WHAT IS ESSENTIAL. UNLESS OUR HEARTS BE FIXED THERE WHERE TRUE JOYS ABOUND AS THE PRAYER BOOK SAYS ... THEN OUR STRIVING WILL BE IN VAIN ... NOT IN THE SENSE THAT IT IS BAD NOR BECAUSE OF SOME ARBITRARY JUDGEMENT ... OUR STRIVING WILL BE IN VAIN SIMPLY BECAUSE WE WILL MISS THE MARK ... WE WILL HAVE THE FORM BUT NOT THE SUBSTANCE ... WE WILL HAVE EXISTED WITHOUT LIVING ... WE WILL HAVE DONE MUCH GOOD PERHAPS OR MUCH WRONG ... BUT WE WILL HAVE MISSED WHAT IS ESSENTIAL...THAT FOR WHICH WE WERE CREATED. WE WILL HAVE RUN THE RACE WITHOUT WINNING THE PRIZE. PAUL PERHAPS PUTS IT BEST IN ANOTHER OFT QUOTED INSIGHT WHEN HE NAMES LOVE AS THAT WHICH IS THE GREATEST OF THE THREE GREAT VIRTUES: FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE.

OF COURSE TO SPEAK OF AFFAIRS OF THE HEART AND OF LOVE IS DIFFICULT THESE DAYS. THESE THINGS HAVE BEEN DRAGGED THROUGH THE MUCK OF TELEVISION TALK AND REALITY SHOWS ... TOSSED ABOUT WILLY NILLY BY POLITICIANS AND TRAMPLED IN ADVERTISING THAT DEPICTS IN THE NAME OF LOVE VERY LITTLE OF WHAT PAUL WOULD HAVE RECOGNIZED AS THE LOVE. SUCH TALK CAN TURN JESUS INTO A SENTIMENTAL OLE FOOL BUT SENTIMENT IS NOT ENOUGH TO GET YOU UP ON A CROSS ... JESUS SPOKE OF WHAT WAS ESSENTIAL AND AS JAMES URGES ... HE LIVED TRUE TO WHAT HE BELIEVED. THAT IS ENOUGH ... AND IN THAT HE ALSO SETS THE BAR HIGH FOR US.

SOME SAY JESUS SETS THE BAR HIGH JUST SO WE WILL FAIL AND IN FALLING LEARN OUR DEPENDENCE ON HIM. IT IS FUNNY SOMETIMES IF YOU STEP BACK JUST A BIT ... IT IS FUNNY THE THINGS WE ATTRIBUTE TO A GOD WHO SPEAKS SO MUCH OF LOVE. TAKE FOR EXAMPLE THE SECTION OF DEUTERONOMY FROM WHICH THE FIRST READING IS TAKEN. DEUTERONOMY IS THE BOOK OF THE LAW. IN IT THE WAY TO GOD ...INDEED THE WAY INTO GOD IS THROUGH OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW. THE ROOTS OF THE ATTITUDE THAT JESUS ENCOUNTERED IN THE PHARISEES LIE WITHIN THIS BOOK. YET THIS SECTION OF THE BOOK OF THE LAW IS ALSO FILLED WITH AND OFTEN SUMMARIZED IN PASSAGES ABOUT LOVE. VERSE 10 IN CHAPTER 5, VERSE 5 IN CHAPTER 6, VERSES 9 AND 12 IN CHAPTER 7, VERSES 15 AND 19 IN CHAPTER 10, AGAIN IN CHAPTER 11, 13, AND 30. IT IS LOVE THAT IS THE FOCUS. JESUS IN TURNING THEM BACK TOWARD WHAT WAS ESSENTIAL WAS NOT DOING SOMETHING NEW BUT RATHER RECOVERING FROM WITHIN THE TRADITION SOMETHING THAT HAD BEEN LOST. OUTWARD OBSERVANCE CAN BE SHALLOW AND...WELL...HEARTLESS UNLESS IT SPRING FROM A TRANSFORMED HEART. A HEART CENTERED IN LOVE.

THE QUESTION IS ...WHAT BEST MOTIVATES ...WHAT BEST FUELS THE TRANSFORMATION OF OUR HEARTS? GUILT OR GRATITUDE? ARE WE ONCE BELOVED CREATURES OF GOD WHO HAVE ERRED AND GONE ASTRAY SO TERRIBLY THAT THE WHOLE OF CREATION HAS BEEN THROWN OFF KILTER AND INTO IMMENSE SUFFERING NECESSITATING A MASSIVE RESCUE OPERATION CULMINATING IN A BLOODY APPEASEMENT OF AN ANGRY GOD. ARE WE LOST SOULS ONCE BEARING THE IMAGE OF GOD BUT NOW HAVING FORFEITED THAT IMAGE WE HAVE NOTHING TO OFFER BUT OUR FEELING OF REMORSE AND GUILT ... LIVING IN A BROKEN WORLD DESTINED FOR A FINAL CORRUPTION AND CATAclysmic JUDGEMENT JESUS AS OUR TICKET HOME?

OR ... OR

ARE WE BEARERS OF THE DIVINE IMAGE HAVING THEREBY EMERGED FROM THE ANIMAL KINGDOM JOINING GOD AS PARTNERS IN THE CONTINUING CREATION OF THE COSMOS? ARE WE FELLOW HEIRS WITH CHRIST IN THE EXTENDED FAMILY OF GOD EMERGING AS THE CREATURES ALWAYS ANTICIPATED AND SEEING IN THE INCARNATION THE NEXT JUMP IN OUR EVOLUTION MANIFESTED IN JESUS AS THE FIRST FRUIT OF ALL CREATURES? ARE WE THEN CALLED TO RESPOND TO GOD WITH

GRATITUDE JOINING IN REALIZING GOD'S KINGDOM IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE ANOTHER AND THE REST OF THE COSMOS?

ARE WE BROKEN, ENSLAVED, WORTHLESS CREATURES ONLY ABLE TO OFFER AT BEST A GUILTY CONSCIENCE OR ARE WE CO-CREATORS WITH GOD ...FELLOW HEIRS WITH CHRIST ... RESPONDING TO CHRIST IN JOY AND GRATITUDE?

GUILT OR GRATITUDE?

FOR ABOUT 500 YEARS IT HAS BEEN GUILT THAT HAS BEEN – AT LEAST IN SOME SCENARIOS – THE MOTIVATING FACTOR. A COMPELLING CASE CAN BE MADE FOR INTERPRETING OUR SITUATION IN THAT FASHION. GRATITUDE DOES ENTER THE PICTURE BUT IT IS GRATITUDE FOR OUR RESCUE FROM THIS BROKEN WORLD.

BUT THERE ARE WITHIN THE TRADITION OTHER POSSIBILITIES AND THE PASSAGE FROM THE LETTER OF JAMES THIS MORNING IS ONE OF THE PASSAGES THAT CAN HELP FORM ANOTHER WAY OF SEEING OUR SITUATION. ***EVERY GENEROUS ACT OF GIVING, EVERY PERFECT GIFT, IS FROM ABOVE, COMING DOWN FROM THE FATHER OF LIGHTS, WITH WHOM THERE IS NO VARIATION OR SHADOW DUE TO CHANGE. IN FULFILLMENT OF HIS OWN PURPOSE HE GIVES US BIRTH BY THE WORD OF TRUTH, SO THAT WE WOULD BECOME A KIND OF FIRST FRUITS OF HIS CREATURES.***

HERE JAMES PAINTS A PICTURE OF US THAT IS DIFFERENT FROM THE ONE SO OFTEN DISPLAYED IN CHRISTIANITY AND OUR MOTIVATION FOR BEING DOERS AND NOT MERELY HEARERS OF THE WORD IS GRATITUDE RATHER THAN GUILT. WE ARE JOINING WITH GOD TO BRING ABOUT GOD'S INTENDED CREATION. A GRAND ENDEAVOR THAT HAS INVOLVED US FROM THE BEGINNING. NOW IN CHRIST WE MOVE INTO A NEW ROLE ... A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CREATOR GOD. WE ACT IN CONFORMITY WITH GOD NOT BECAUSE THE LAW COMPELS US TO OUTWARDLY CONFORM ...NOW WE STRIVE TO BE SO TRANSFORMED WITHIN THAT WE ARE IMPELLED BY THE SPIRIT TO BE DOERS OF THE WILL OF GOD. THIS PEOPLE, JESUS SAID AS HE QUOTED ISAIAH, SPEAKING OF THOSE WHO ONLY OUTWARDLY CONFORM, ...THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR

LIPS, HE SAID, BUT THEIR HEARTS ARE FAR FROM ME. JESUS THEN CALLS THE PEOPLE TO AN INNER TRANSFORMATION... IT IS NOT TO BE A PRIVATE CONVERSION SPARKED BY EMOTIONS WITH A BRIGHT BURNING EMBER THAT SOON FADES. BUT AN INNER, ON-GOING REORIENTATION WHICH BECOMES PUBLIC IN OUR OFFERING OF SELF IN THE CONTINUING WORK OF CREATION. A CONVERSION THAT RESETS THE PLACE OF HUMANS WITHIN THE CREATED ORDER BY REESTABLISHING A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP FIRST WITH GOD...THEN WITH OURSELVES...AND FINALLY WITH ONE ANOTHER.

IN THIS WE BECOME LITTLE PRINCES ...RETURNING TO THE PLACE WE STARTED BUT SEEING IT WITH A NEW KIND OF LOVE. AS THE LITTLE PRINCE RETURNED TO CARE FOR HIS FLOWER SO IN GRATITUDE WE GIVE OF OURSELVES IN THE PLACES WE ARE PLANTED. BEING DOERS OF THE WORD. CO-CREATORS AND FELLOW HEIRS WITH CHRIST.