
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

July 27, 2014

Cool Christianity

*“They told him, ‘Jesus the Nazarene is passing by.’
The blind man shouted, ‘Jesus, Son of David, show me mercy.’”*
Luke 18:37, 38 (Common English Bible)

There is a cool, casual note in this familiar story asserts David H. C. Read. Jesus is passing by. He is interrupted by the beggar’s cry. Jesus turns to the beggar, and to the astonishment of everyone asks, “What do you want me to do for you?” The question seems utterly ridiculous. Those who are blind rarely blend into a crowd. Blindness is a physical condition that is fairly apparent to anyone paying attention. Here, this man who is blind asks that Jesus show some mercy for him. Yet, Jesus asks what it is that the man wants. Jesus sounds like a young child, adsorbed in a hand-held electronic game only half-listening. Present is the desire to rip the game from the child’s hands and demand that they pay attention when they are being spoken to.

Our difficulty with this story is how casual Jesus is. Jesus didn’t approach the blind man and offer help. Jesus doesn’t even seem to have noticed the blind man. The story tells us that Jesus was simply passing by. Had the blind man not called-out to Jesus we are left to assume that Jesus would have simply kept walking. What are we to do with a Savior that apparently walks right pass such obvious need?

Perhaps the reason many find this story so troubling, says Read, is that it challenges the prevailing assumption that Jesus has come to help us; that the Christian Church exists for nothing more than to meet the perceived needs of others. What if our assumptions about Jesus and the Church are wrong? What if it is Jesus’ intention here to challenge – and correct – our entire understanding of the purpose of Jesus’ mission?

Any rethinking with regard to what Jesus is about must take seriously that Jesus did feed the hungry, friend the friendless and heal the sick. Even in this story, Jesus does restore sight to the man who asks for mercy, albeit after the man asks. The mission of the Church is to participate with Jesus in what He did and continues to do today. So it follows that the Church’s role is to help wherever there is human need. But to follow Jesus authentically demands that we pay attention to the “how” question; the manner in which Jesus cares for human need.

A careful reading of Jesus’ ministry results in a rather surprising discovery, Jesus comes within reach of human need, but He doesn’t intrude. Absent in Jesus’ ministry is intrusion, or pushing, or arrogance. Jesus comes to meet us in our need but always waits for our movement toward Him. It is important to recall that image of Jesus in the Book of Revelation where He stands at the door and knocks. Notice, Jesus doesn’t intrude by opening the door uninvited. What is meant by “Cool Christianity” is that the way of Christ is always loving concern that prays, that is present and ready to act – but never intrudes.

Doug Hood

An adaptation of a longer sermon by David H. C. Read, former pastor of the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York City, by the same title.

Reprinted from Dr. Hood’s July 17, 2014 blog posting.