

Thursday, March 4

Stephanie Rzonca

Throughout the course of the pandemic, one theme that I've been living out has been solitude. Sometimes that solitude feels nourishing, (I'm sure my introvert friends can relate,) and sometimes that solitude has felt overwhelming. As the events of 2020 came rolling in, crashing on us like waves one after another, I was alone. All of the news, including the pandemic's deadly progression through our country, the other deadly virus of racism, white supremacy, and police brutality, and the political crises that seemed unending, forced me to carefully examine my values, my goals, my allegiances, and myself. As I was hit again and again, with wave upon wave of news, of grief, of trauma, of calamity, I was left alone with the questions: "What does this have to do with me?" "What is my role in this?" "How have I been complicit in this system?" "What is really important to me?" "Have I been living in alignment with my values?" "Do my relationships reflect alignment with those values?" And I had nothing and no one to distract me from those thoughts. In solitude, I could brood and ponder.

In Mark 8:36, Jesus asks, "*And what do you benefit when you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?*" The pandemic has offered us the opportunity to pause from the mindless habit of world seeking. Our culture molds us into people striving to gain the world through our careers, through our social expectations, as well as consumerism, entertainment, and leisure. Most or all of those activities have been shifted or adjusted in some way during the pandemic, allowing us the space to reconsider what we are striving for - are we living a goals-oriented life, or a values-oriented life? When our lives are on autopilot, with great things coming our way, consistent incomes, enjoyable products or hobbies to consume, and great friends to spend time with, we might forget about the worth of our souls. We might lose sight of our values, we might not be as hurt or as affected when we hear of others suffering. But through hardship, we can choose to either strengthen our integrity or allow it to collapse.

For me, this time of solitude and evaluation has meant abandoning a relationship I worked hard to cultivate, because it wasn't in alignment with my values. It meant curating my days to include more time for meditation, learning, and self-care. It meant a lot of sadness, a lot of grief, and a lot of honesty with myself that previously had been avoided. But it also means that I feel a new sense of confidence in myself, and a sense of being strongly rooted in my values.