

Introduction

It was 1914, the entire world was at war for the first time. Teilhard de Chardin, a French Jesuit priest and scientist went into the trenches to serve his fellow human beings. And he became a stretcher-bearer, desiring to be with ordinary people in the midst of war – he was with the Tunisian regiment, consisting largely of Muslims men.

Teilhard here sees immense suffering – And in all this turmoil, he starts writing his essays because he felt he might die any moment.

His book “Writings in Time of War,” is a collection of essays, and he vividly describes how he brings these dying wounded men from the front of the fighting line to the back for medical attention.

But he also pens the words of a much bigger vision of life:

“My starting point is the fundamental initial fact that each one of us is perforce linked by all the material, organic and psychic strands of his being to all that surrounds him.”

Teilhard invites us, no matter where we find ourselves today – perhaps in a complicated place that we are immersed in – perhaps overwhelmed with living, decisions, trying to care for those around us,

Teilhard invites us into a bigger vision of the cosmos. He was a paleontologist. So he is not only inviting us into a vision of years, but a vision of millennia. One informed by the enormity of LOVE.

He wrote:

“After harnessing all the energies of earth, sea and sky, humanity will finally learn how to harness the greatest energy, love. And on that day – we will have discovered fire for the second time”

A few disclaimers...

I don't claim to understand all the writings of Teilhard de Chardin – I am a beginner. I am relying on guides who have read more of his words than I have.

His biographer Ursula King;

Episcopal Priest and contemplative writer Cynthia Bourgeois;

and Celtic spirituality author John Philip Newell.

Reading Teilhard side by side to Jesus' parable of the lost son, opens up a new of seeing for me – one of evolutionary spirituality.

What if the parable of the prodigal, is opening us up to seeing a new threshold for humanity? Becoming human, in a different way from the way our forebears were?

For as Cynthia Bourgeois writes

Jesus' parables are wisdom teachings to challenge our operating systems, assumptions and beliefs.

They are meant to get under skin and make us feel uncomfortable - revealing patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving that are entrenched.

And open us up to a moment of surrender, where we allow the Spirit to transform us and take us beyond where we are.

So, as we think of the younger son - we are usually drawn to think in binary terms Where leaving is bad, ill advised, and disruptive – an act of rebellion.

But **leaving** could be positive – it might mean moving away from a harmful situation, or moving beyond a small way of seeing into something bigger.

What if **Returning** or **staying** in a situation was only to please people – not core to what we feel the Spirit is calling us too, like a cycle of habitual actions we cannot break.

This is where I so appreciate Teilhard's views on redemption (as articulated by John Philip Newell).

Teilhard, teaches us that love's redemptive work is about turning sin into new beginnings and in that sense redeeming sin.

It is about allowing what we view as the failures of life, whether individual or collective, yes to be the occasion for seeking forgiveness and reconciliation, But more than this to enable the wrongs we have committed or experienced to become the **very seedbed** from which new beginnings may arise.

I imagine the younger son, not only receiving the grace of his father as he returns, but also receiving the graces of the experience he gained in his leaving and in his returning.

As I reflect on the older son in the parable it allows us to draw on Teilhard's teachings about the mystical body of humanity.

The older son mirrors back to us the times in life when we get stuck in Cynthia – getting stuck in trying to keep score, in comparison with others, or competition.

It distances us from others, rather than inviting us into relationship.

I am struck by the elder brother's distancing from his sibling.
In his words to his father – "this son of yours".

Resentment, envy, comparison - I know this in me at times when I cannot bear to face my connection to someone else because of anger, or buried pain or hurt I feel.

Teilhard's big vision for humanity is one where there is a **dimension deep within us and deep within the matter of the universe that invites union.**

By union, Teilhard means the oneness of interrelatedness.

Philip Newell describes this in a helpful way. He writes:
"Teilhard does not mean uniformity or conformity. One of the guiding principles in both his scientific work and his spiritual teaching is that true union differentiates.

It is what we know in the realm of scientific observation.
The oneness of the universe keeps producing greater and greater multiplicity, more and more differentiation of life-forms.

We also know this in the most intimate relationships of our lives.

The people who truly love us, and are thus most deeply one with us, are the people who have the capacity to most radically set us free to be ourselves.

They delight in the uniqueness of our heart and mind, our body and soul; everything in us is cherished by everything in them.

True union gives birth to the glory of differentiation" End quote.

I wonder for myself those times that I face the pain and hurt of the other – and am tempted to keep distancing by crafting my own position – mostly out of fear.

What would it mean to let go?

To trust. To entrust.

And let myself be drawn into the movement of God toward unifying.

We are brought full circle back to **generous love** as we look at the parent image in the story.

As Rembrandt painting shows in the careful detailing of the hands of a woman and a man – a father and a mother – embracing their child.

Generous love is the very heartbeat of the cosmos.

Teilhard writes that this is the radiant heart of Christ, he called it the universal Christic presence.

This is not an abstract or hypothetical idea – But a living reality.

It sets up a feedback loop for us.

Whereby even in the midst of the most overwhelming opposition and despair, we can still set our sights on and draw sustaining energy from Christ – the Alpha and Omega— “in whom all things hold together.”

Teilhard called it: “harnessing the energy of love.”

In our own times, this is probably the best thing we can do.

It is the action of faith – as an antidote to all the wrong and suffering around us.

It is a call to receive the loving embrace and discover— all our fear and skepticism to the contrary— that this love really does hold us up.

Amen.