

"I still have many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now."

Jesus is leaving the disciples and yet he still has many things to say to them. Time is running out. He is leaving them. Yet this is not the main reason, it seems, why he is not able to tell them now. It's not so much that time is running out as that they are "not able to bear them now."

Jesus has stretched and challenged his disciples in his teaching. He has turned things upside down and inside out. Often they have been perplexed and unable to understand what he is saying. Jesus's words, his teaching, have been difficult enough as it is, yet now he is telling them: I have still more to say to you but you cannot bear it now. So it will have to wait. Wait until the "Spirit of truth" comes, "who will guide you into all the truth."

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I wonder if this has been your experience too on your spiritual journey? Where you get to a point you don't think you can go beyond – or perhaps don't even realize that there is a beyond to which we not only *can* go, but *must* go if we are to grow and become what/who God is creating us to be. As I look back, I can certainly identify with this. Imagine if you could have a conversation with your former self, the you of ten, twenty, thirty years ago!

Maybe, looking back, we can remember times when we saw things differently; and yet with time and experience, perhaps even painful experience, our perspective on life, on reality, on our faith, on our belief, even/especially our perspective on God, had to change, and has changed – so much even that it is hard to imagine or remember how differently we once saw things.

It is a bit like how our perspective changes as get higher and higher up a mountain, how the ocean looks, for example, as we follow a trail up the mountain. I am always amazed at how dramatically and how quickly the view of the ocean changes and expands as I gain height – especially perhaps because of the parts where the ocean is hidden altogether because of the trees or the lay of the land, and then you come to another opening and catch a glimpse of the changing scene, or even more when you reach a point when the whole expanse of the ocean seems to open out. Yet even this is only a limited view – think of how high up you are when you get to the gondola for Grouse Mountain, and yet there's still so much of the mountain still above us.

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What did Jesus still have to say to his disciples that they could not yet bear? Things that he could not tell them before he died; things that he could not say to them (or that they were unable to bear) even after the resurrection for the forty days before he ascended into heaven;

things that had to wait for the Holy Spirit who would lead them into all truth. And, I wonder what we may need to hear, but that we are unable to bear, that will take us beyond where we presently are, take us on the next stage of the journey up the mountain of life?

There are times and situations in our lives that you have to live through before we can begin to make any sense or perceive any meaning and purpose in them. This inevitably means we make mistakes, we get it wrong – just as the disciples did over and over again – yet their mistakes, and our mistakes, are not pointless, but are opportunities to learn and grow, and without which we are not able to grow and move beyond where we stand – and sometimes maybe we feel we stand in the same place for a long time before we can see any change – perhaps that’s a bit like the times when we are walking in darkness through the forest (maybe on the Grouse Grind for example) and cannot see how far up we have climbed until we reach another opening and glimpse the ocean again, showing us how high we’ve come without even realizing it.

One of the biggest lessons for me, and one that it seems I have to learn over and over again, is that it is not so much the specific details of whatever situation we find ourselves in that is most important, but rather how we are as we live through it (how *I am* as I live through it) – whatever the challenge we face, whatever the conflict or dispute we find ourselves in, whatever the project is in which we are engaged; whatever it seems to be about is *not* what it is really about: that’s just the stage on which the character we play is to be played out. It’s not about the “what” of the situation, or even its outcome, so much as the “how” and “who” I am in it.

The character that we play is not simply a role in the play of life – all the world’s a stage, and each must play a part – it’s more to do with our *character development* in the sense of who we are becoming – becoming who we are.

St. Paul, in our reading from Romans, talks about “*boasting*” in our sufferings – I’m not sure I would use the word “boasting,” but perhaps there is a sense here of being able to accept, and even embrace, our sufferings as something positive that brings about growth in our lives. We all suffer, that is a given. We suffer in body, mind and spirit; we suffer loss of loved ones; letting go of one stage of our lives in order for a new one to begin; leaving one city or country and moving to another; losing a job or a contract or a promotion; suffering disappointment. All life involves suffering; that is a given. A noble truth, even.

But St. Paul is able to accept it, even embrace it, even “boast” in it because the suffering that he has to live through produces the fruit of being lived through that he calls “endurance” – endurance describes an ability to “live through” a situation, a time of suffering, of grief, of challenge, and this “endurance,” he says, is what produces “character.” And character is about who-we-are (and who we are becoming).

This is what *I am* learning: it is not the specifics of whatever situation we find ourselves in that is most important – the challenge, the conflict, the dispute, the variance between us in expectations, but rather how we are as we live through it (how *I am* as I live through it). In

whatever situation we are engaged, whatever it seems to be about is not what it is really about. Instead, our focus (my focus) has to be on how *I am* as I live through it – it's about finding and keeping my centre, my sense of *I Am*, in the midst of whatever situation I find myself in; in whatever situation I find my *self* in – my *I Am*. It is about being present. Practicing presence.

This applies to us as individuals, of course. It applies even more to us in relation to one another, as a community of people, and especially as a church, a community of faith, seeking to live out the good news of Jesus in our lives and in our life together. Love one another, Jesus said, as I have loved you – by this everyone will know you are my disciples if you have love for one another. This was his commandment to his disciples, love one another; and he gave it to them not because it was easy, and sounded nice. It may sound nice, but it's not easy, that's the point. Love hurts. You cannot love without getting your heart broken.

“...suffering produces endurance,” Paul said, “and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” Jesus not only tells us to love one another, but he pours the love of God into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, so that we are in fact able to love another.

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