

# From Ego to Easter:

## *Letting Jesus Find You*

*John the Baptist...started preaching, "Turn away from your sins...because the Kingdom of heaven is near!... Prepare a road for the Lord, make a straight path for him to travel!" Matt. 3:1-3TEV*

*(John said), "I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.... That joy is mine and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less." John 3:27-30NIV*

*(Jesus) said to them, "I must preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God...because that is what God sent me to do." Luke 4:43*

Jesus is evidence that AbbaFather wants to enter your life. His Good News is not about "finding Jesus." It's about welcoming the Kingdom of God into this world (Matt. 4:23).

Jesus is not lost or playing hide-and-seek. Rather, as John declared, He's calling us to open the pathway to your heart for Him to come in. He wants to clear out the emotional and spiritual baggage there **so God can "find" you** and prepare you for your role in advancing His authority.

John is not offended at Jesus' coming, nor fearful of being exposed. Nor is his ego diminished. He's not only delighted to welcome Jesus, but is "full of joy" (NIV) knowing he's done his job well and his task is "now complete."

"(Jesus) must become greater," he proclaims, "and I must become less."

A timely, if not challenging word for us today.

The pandemic, in fact, has made us all feel less, by literally shutting down the humanly-made structures and accomplishments that make us feel in control.

Now, the vaccine has made us cautiously optimistic about returning to "normal." The covid virus, however, has claimed over half a million American lives—a staggering cost which commands a lesson—and warning—we dare not ignore:

If you stay focused on yourself to feel bigger again and get "back in control," ultimately the overwhelming power of the world just makes you feel as if you're disappearing.

It's a recipe for anxiety.

If you yield to your AbbaFather's control, however, you're in good company with John the Baptist.

For Christians, getting smaller is no occasion to shrink from life into despair and fear, but rather, to make more room for the "life abundant" that His Spirit enables (John 10:10).

In order to welcome Jesus, that is, you must become less. Not for you to disappear more quickly, but for Jesus to appear more fully.

In fact, the "smaller" you become—that is, humble and receptive before God—the greater potential for Jesus to reveal and fulfill your true purpose in life, as designed by the Creator and not fabricated by your fantasies.

That's His recipe for peace.

Here, in fact, is the message of both Good Friday and Easter: When you accept Jesus as the authentic Savior of the world—even your own world—His grace saves you from your narrow, self-centered vision for the Father's larger purposes. At last, the Kingdom rule of God is indeed "at hand"—that is, possible to entertain and participate in, even amid your terminal sin nature.

For starters, you can now be humble as a child, safely repent of your wrongs, receive your Father's grace, discern His call on your life, and receive the power of His Spirit to walk it out (Matt. 1:4,5).

As with John, great joy fills your heart as you "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8NIV).

Eventually, however, the pain and disappointments of this broken world begin to challenge your faith, shaking the foundations of your own achievements and righteousness. Increasingly, the world testifies, as through great loss or illness, to the blindness and inadequacy of your self-centeredness.

You begin to realize that Jesus is no ticket to Disneyland.

In a word, you feel "less."

Humiliation beckons. The Kingdom of God's rule that you once longed for and "tasted" in Jesus, seems more of a stumbling block than a blessing.

That's because AbbaFather's blessing presumes an agenda far greater than your own.

As you allow God's Kingdom to take over your own kingdom, that is, the eventual curse in the world's humiliation becomes the blessing in His humility. Those who dare to know they are weak and lost, are the first to cry out for—and experience—the Father's strength and focus.

Two years ago, I was diagnosed with a severe medical condition which I still struggle to overcome. I don't believe that God caused it, but clearly He has allowed it. Certainly, I wouldn't have chosen it. I've been learning, however, to consecrate my pain and fear by surrendering it to Him for His purposes.

Surgery, in fact, causes pain—not to destroy you, but rather, to heal you and thereby fit you to walk out your life purpose. I don't praise the surgeon for the pain, but I recognize that surgery requires it.

Like Jesus, who "in his life on earth made his prayers and requests with loud cries and tears to God," I've sought His healing via both medical doctors and prayer intercessors (Heb. 5:7-8).

When I don't see "evidence" of healing, I do my best to trust Him. When my faith falls short, thankfully I have dedicated intercessors who lift me up with their faith.

I can testify that AbbaFather has used this process to draw me to Himself far more deeply than I would ever have dared allow without it. With it, I believe God is preparing me more completely to fulfill my role in His "Kingdom come" (Matt. 6:12).

That's what the desert trial accomplished for Israel—even as it framed Jesus' crucifixion during the Passover which celebrates it:

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to find out what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands (Deut. 8:2).

If Israel had not faced and persevered in their painful ordeal, they would never have reached the Promised Land; God's saving purposes for humanity via the Jews would have been short-circuited. Similarly, Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection released the Holy Spirit who animated Him to animate us unto today.

It's fitting this Holy Week, therefore, to remember the Story: There's no Passover freeing you to live out God's promises without its desert wilderness of uncertainty and pain, nor Easter and God's greatness without its Good Friday of becoming less.

Amid our trials, it's human nature to ask, if not demand, "How long does this process last?"

It's God nature to respond, "As long as it takes."

After all, you have some agency in the process. If the patient fights to get off the operating table, the surgery takes longer.

It's called growing up.

The Great Question of youth—Who am I?—is thereby settled as you face the authentic question of mature faith: Whose am I?

Certainly, AbbaFather can heal physical brokenness, overcome emotional distress, and evict spiritual evil from you. We rightly pray for His healing, peace, and deliverance—and praise Him when He provides it.

Such healing is a genuine but not sufficient revelation of God's Kingdom—which, as Jesus declared, includes not only "recovery of sight to the blind," but indeed, "to bring good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, and to set free the oppressed" (Luke 4:18).

My own malady, in fact, has made me question my own—and the larger Church's—often exclusive focus on physical healing.

What if, in fact, God uses suffering to prepare a way in our hearts for Him to find us? Indeed, could focusing exclusively on your own healing—and ignoring Jesus' focus on God's larger Kingdom—become a distraction from God's surgery?

Certainly, God doesn't always heal you instantly or according to your plan. Can you nevertheless then dare persevere in faith to pray, "Father, please use this ordeal to draw me closer to you and prepare me for your Kingdom plan in my life?"

Without such humility, too often we devolve into easy prayer formulas that focus on our performance instead of God's—and thereby, breed shame and doubt when our efforts "don't work."

Where's the line between presumption and faith?

Discernment is in order here.

Jesus has come to heal a broken world and recruit you to follow Him. What if the blessing of your healing is not an end in itself—but as likely, John the Baptist's call to make more room for Jesus and His Kingdom agenda for your life? (Rom. 2:4).

If so, healing begins by facing the world's brokenness in yourself (2 Corinth. 1:1-5).

From this view, the only way out of the world's pain and disappointment—even death itself—is through it with Jesus.

That means you have to be crucified at some point in your faith journey. Your self-centered human nature must be nailed to the cross with Him. You have to face the upending truth that apart from Jesus, you're at the mercy of the world and can never save yourself fully from its deceptions and brokenness (Rom. 7:14-8:1).

That's how Jesus' nature, as revealed in Holy Spirit, begins to replace the kingdom of Me with the Kingdom of God.

Actually, it's awfully simple: You become less, so Jesus can become more.

It can be awfully hard, however, if you have a belly button—which marks you as a certified sinner, hard-wired to turn away from God's call.

His surgery for this terminal disease is crucifixion.

His healing in that process is not just a body that now works again, but a grateful heart to embrace His Kingdom goals for your life (Rom. 2:4).

That means giving up your life to God and trusting Jesus to lead you through it all. It means facing that our self-serving human nature is just not capable of generating such faith. As Paul reminds, however, "God is always at work in you to make you willing and able to obey his purposes" (Phil. 2:12-13).

Of course, some day each of us will be so "less" that we leave this world for the next—where Jesus is not just greater, but at last, All.

Meanwhile, we persevere.

As I have gratefully experienced at times, this surrender and its healing can be instantaneous. But most often it seems to be an ongoing process that's become a lifestyle.

Sure, I want to hear those words, "Rise and walk—I have healed you." But until then—even as I pray for that healing—I'm learning to find peace in my Father's promise, "Trust and walk—I am healing you."

To me, that's the marriage of Good Friday's great loss and Easter's greater victory.