

Thursday, June 18, 2020

Beginner's Mind

- Pastor Hank French

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:1-4).

In order to develop and deepen our life of faith, we need to have what is known as "beginner's mind." A beginner's mind is an open mind, fresh and enthusiastic, with a deep sense of possibilities unfolding. A beginner's mind is not burdened with old habitual ways of thinking and acting, and so is open to new ways of thinking and acting.

A beginner's mind is, in many ways, a childlike mind. Children are always learning, and they don't let what they learn today stand in the way of learning something new—and possibly contradictory—tomorrow. Here we have another reason why Jesus insisted that unless we change and become like children, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3). Young children have not yet developed into people who want to be known as "someone who knows;" they simply want to learn, to experience, to grow.

Young children do not have much if any baggage to get in the way of an open, curious, inquisitive, and guileless encounter with the world around them. They don't bring filters or interpretive lenses to their experience. They take what is as it is and let it teach them what it will. Such childlikeness in the face of all that is unknown is an essential quality for those who want to walk a spiritual path.

People with beginner's mind are always being surprised. People who think they already "know" are rarely if ever surprised. We are finite creatures, which means that we are limited creatures. No matter how much we learn, our knowledge will always be imperfect and incomplete. We can never fully comprehend or know "Truth" with a capital T. All our truths are small t truths, which means that all our truths are tentative, subject to new learning, new insight, new experience.

This is a very freeing idea. Too many people are virtual slaves to entrenched opinions, firmly held convictions, outdated ideas, and narrow points of view which they express as "Truth" with a capital T, "Truths" which they must defend at all costs. Think of all the human misery that has been caused because one person's capital T Truth is different from someone else's. Perhaps if we all had beginner's mind, if we were all able to follow the expression of our truth with "Maybe so. Maybe not so," then we could learn from each other rather than judge each other.

As we develop and deepen our life of faith—and we should all be doing that all the time—keep the childlike openness, the freshness, the inquisitiveness, the delight in learning, the capacity for wonder and mystery of beginner's mind. It will keep our feet on a genuinely spiritual path.

Prayer: Holy God, may I always be a beginner so I never stop growing.