

The People in the Chairs [Deeper Sheet 6.07.09]

A true teacher, Jesus didn't want to know what everyone else thought. He wanted to know what his disciples thought: "Who do you say I am?" He was a Jew and a rabbi, yes. And he'd attracted quite a following with his masterful teaching. His disciples were a ragtag bunch, traveling from village to village listening to Jesus teach and watching him heal the sick. But he wanted to know what they thought. And he asks his question with a seeming sense of urgency, as if he were asking the question not only to his followers then and there, but to all people, in every time and place. "Who do you say that I am?" At the center of all that we believe, driving everything we do is this: Jesus is our only hope, and the best possible life is right relationship with God through faith in Jesus.

The Scriptures tell the story of God creating a good world, marked with glory. But sin opened up an abyss between God and people, and it continues to open chasms between us today. That story reaches its climax in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. God's relentless pursuit to put the world back together is fulfilled in Christ. So why did he come? To restore and remake everything, to fill the crevices that exist between God and people. Jesus is a picture of how relentless God is about being in relationship with us.

But that's not all. The disciples' goal was to learn the rabbi's ways in order to become like the rabbi themselves. So Jesus showed them the work of God, and eventually sent them out to do the work themselves. The early Christians became consumed with caring for the needy, so much so that they decided to elect deacons to see that people were cared for so they could devote themselves to prayer. Growing in faith is constant interplay between the work of God and prayer. Jesus was constantly going off by himself to pray, and he made a point to teach his disciples how to pray.

Ultimately, the way of Jesus is communal. To love God is to love your neighbor, and how can you love your neighbor if you don't know your neighbor? The great temptation of our time is to retreat within. We're individuals suffering in isolation and fragmentation, highly connected and surrounded by people, yet very much alone. It's possible to sit in a chair in a room full of people and be totally alone. The communal life of God beckons us to get out of the chair and get involved, to take the earphones out and start pursuing the people around us with the same blazing and relentless love of Christ. Maybe the saddest part of this is that there are those of us who are all too familiar with these ideas. We think of them as "basic." But these "basic" ideas have landed people in jail and cost people their lives. They've birthed imaginative ways of living. These basics are intoxicating, dangerous, and subversive, and we need to be constantly reminded of that.

Imagine Jesus putting the question to you: "Who do you say that I am?" How would you respond?

How have you experienced God as relentless?

What work are you part of that is deepening your faith right now?

Why do you think prayer is so significant in a life of faith? Think beyond the idea that it's "just what we're supposed to do."

Think about the community or communities that you are part of. How are you "involved" in the life of others in those communities?