

A Better Spring

by Rebecca Bynum (May 2015)

What from this barren being do we reap?
Our senses narrow, and our reason frail,
Life short, and truth a gem which loves the deep,
And all things weighed in Custom's falsest scale;
Opinion an Omnipotence, – whose veil
Mantles the earth with darkness, until right
And wrong are accidents, and Men grow pale
Lest their own judgments should become too bright,
And their free thoughts be crimes, and Earth have too much light.

(...)

Yet, Freedom! yet thy banner, torn, but flying,
Streams like the thunder-storm against the wind;
Thy trumpet voice, though broken now and dying,
The loudest still the Tempest leaves behind;
Thy tree hath lost its blossoms, and the rind,
Chopped by the axe, looks rough and little worth,
But the sap lasts, – and still the seed we find
Sown deep, even in the bosom of the North;
So shall a better spring less bitter fruit bring forth.

– Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto the Fourth

Freedom and Truth are ever linked by those who ponder the depths of reality. False belief leads inexorably to spiritual bondage and, being mortal, we will inevitably be burdened with sins small and large throughout our earthly lives, even as our forefathers have been throughout the ages. This is the curse and the blessing of life; for where there is intelligence, truth will be sought, belief sifted and altered, and reality eventually found. Where would the adventure in living be if every answer were known in advance? The individual's search for truth and his struggle for righteousness is no small thing – it is everything.

Before the coming of Jesus, it was assumed, and, in fact, it is still largely assumed, that righteous action had to come first – that good works were the key to entering the kingdom of

heaven, which would only occur after death. Jesus turned this assumption upside down. He offered us choice to enter the kingdom of heaven *now*, through faith alone, and then, after one is securely inside, the old habits of sin will naturally fall away and be replaced by the joy of living rightly. Living wrongly, that is, sinfully, is incompatible with a life of consecrated devotion to God.

The Master beckons; the door is open, come in and be reborn. And once a man is born of the spirit, he will no longer sin. There will no longer be the desire to sin. The lure of heaven is much stronger than the lure of self. Once the joys of the spirit have been tasted, the old life of the flesh and even the life of the mind appears drab, stale and meaningless. We will then overcome the world with our faith. The gospel is simple and clear-cut. Man need only reach out in faith and the transformative power of the spirit will do the rest. Believe and be saved. The message of Jesus is as simple as that.

Men down through the centuries have not failed to grasp the gospel intellectually, but they were afraid to grasp it spiritually. Men are afraid to lay hold of Jesus, not because they don't want what he can do *for* them, rather because they fear what he will do *to* them and the loss of control this implies; even the loss of the old familiar self. The transformation of the spirit is a frightening prospect for the ego.

To believe *in* Jesus, we first simply believe him – believe his word. He is the Son of Man and the Son of God, human and divine. He is alive and spiritually dwelling within us, just as he promised. He is the living way and an ever-present friend. He understands us because he was once one of us. The unfathomable gap between man and God is bridged in him and so he knows us and loves us as we are. His love, like the love of The Father, is not withheld until after we become better; we are loved and cherished in the present moment.

Naturally, it is not up to man to take upon himself the divine prerogatives, such as the forgiveness of sin, or that of deciding who and who should not enter the kingdom of heaven. Aside from Jesus, no human being has ever known or can ever know the divine mind so completely. But each person can have a true relationship with Jesus' living spirit. We can know him personally, as a friend, just as we know other persons. Within this friendship, guidance and advice may be secured for the mind of Jesus and that of the Father are one. We can always be assured that there is no conflict between the two. Jesus is a living bridge to the Father and is forever real in our experience. A priest or a pastor can help to point the way, but they can never, and should never, presume to take the place of the spirit of Jesus in the experience of any mortal. In our minds' eyes we may ever behold his face and live always in his presence. The experience of God is person to person.

The ultimate arbiter, evidence of the reality of the gospel, is found in the spiritual experience of the believer. Those who have entered the kingdom and dwell in the Father's house do so in this life and this reality. The Father's children are not kept in suspense until they die, they are conscious of their status as sons and daughters of the living God in the here and now. Those who, even today, demand "proof" are no different than those who during the life of Jesus clamored for a "sign" – a material demonstration of spiritual reality. To perceive the spirit, one must be born of the spirit. As Jesus knew, material demonstrations do not produce those changes of heart needed for spiritual conversion. And for those born of the spirit, no material demonstration is necessary.

These spiritual seeds have been planted, however imperfectly, in the hearts of men. Most lie cold and dormant as the world seems to spiral out of control and we await the coming gentle warmth of a better spring.

Rebecca Bynum's latest book is