

Liminal/Irreplaceable

Exodus 32:7-14; Luke 15:1-10

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“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Go down at once! Your people have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshipped it and sacrificed to it.’”

Today is the 5th of May and the year is 2012. These things I can attest to as being true. My calendars, both in physical and digital form, assure me of this fact. Yet, though I can feel confident in this being my exact bearing in history, I could just as easily be led to believe it is still September 11th, 2001. Or even, for that matter, September 11th, twenty years later. Yes, my body, without a doubt, is present here: May 5th, 2012; I am not so far gone that I can't be an eye-witness to this account. But you see, my heart and mind, for better or worse (but much more likely worse), have taken up residence in those other spaces of time.

It seems, doesn't it, that we are so often lost when in the waiting room of Time.

We replace what is for that which isn't while dreaming of what hasn't. But it's not really our fault now is it? God never fully calibrated us for this. For though time only appears to move at a constant rate and in one direction, we are yet frustratingly destined to attempts that would either lengthen it or pause it, reverse it or fast-forward it, completely or just a little, autonomously and at will.

They say that the great dilemma of our lives is coming face-to-face with our mortality. To me, that's far too simplistic. Especially as it's something I can readily understand and have so devastatingly witnessed. We are born and we die. There is a beginning and an end. A plane and collapse -- a dead husband and a widowed wife. Me. But what I can't get, or rather, what I can't seem to ever fully grasp or since appreciate is the significance of all that must come in the middle; that which now carries on after the start, and that which must continue long before the finish line. To me that is the great dilemma of our humanity. Coming to terms and engagement with this present tense (especially for those of us who grieve or who are sad). With this steady, unbending flow of the here and now. Or in other words, with that which is, as opposed to that which was, and that which hasn't yet.

But try as we might, it seems that most of us, even the healthy and the happy, are too often discouraged by and uninspired with that which is tangibly around us. With this the in-between. This liminal space. And I think it's because we don't know how to properly frame it. See, we can easily understand what came before. We can actually feel its pain or take pleasure in its wonder. Just the same, we are adept at suspecting what might come next, lucidly entering its dreams or quite literally bracing for its nightmares. And so we can capably look forward and backward, but hardly ever within. And so we live, or not really live, always waiting in anticipation for what's soon arriving, or usually worse, hanging onto that which had already been long ago delivered, such that the here and the touchable feels weightless and tedious, lame and unimportant.

But it's not really those things now, is it?

We live for the chase, some say. And those some are usually right. We are always looking out for the greener grass on the other side of this fence. For the golden age that once was or the promise of enlightenment of what soon may follow. But the present just feels like a slog until, that is, it

becomes the past, and then and only then is it ever fondly remembered. And so, ironically, we don't actually live IN time. But rather OUT of it. And thus, we waste it. Erecting idols and imagining mirages, following phantoms and conjuring distractions, so to escape the waiting rooms of minutes and hours, of days and months, and years upon years. Like those people who waited forever for that guy to return with those tablets, we set before us a golden calf and pretend that it's the same as the holy. That it's just as good and worthy. But fools, are we all.

And yes, I too am a fool. I've wasted this last decade pining for what isn't, for what can never be replaced, and substituted both for the pedestal of depression. Yes, I am now one of those people. One of those sad little people who idolize their victimhood, who parade their sadness around as if it's a pinned badge. But inside I'm like a lost button, forgotten somewhere under some couch where love used to sit. I still exist, surely, but my exact whereabouts are a bit of an unknown, and I'm now covered by dust, and dog hair, and crumbs of old pizza crust.

My minister tells me that I'll find what I've lost, in this case myself, when I finally stop dwelling on it. As in, he elaborates, only when I stop dwelling in the past, of a time that can no longer be, and cease to wait on a moment that hasn't yet come or returned; only when I've forgotten to remember and sleep without dreaming, that I'll finally discover where I am, whose I am, and what I am needing to do so to get me to where I ought to be. Honestly, I think he's a bit of a fool himself, but hey, I'm out of ideas and I just despise feeling this way. Day after excruciating day.

Endings and beginnings; beginnings and endings... these are so often the story of our stories. But today, I just want my story to abide somewhere else. So why not this middle? In this in-between. In this now, undefined space where everything that will be, and that soon becomes what was, is actually yet happening.

Where I am no longer haunted, where I no longer wait. Where I just wake up and be. A clean and wiped slate, ready but not expecting a surprise or two or three. No, it won't be easy. And yes, I'll probably fail, but... ha!!

look...

a button.