

The Green in Me

I visited the Nazi concentration camp at Dachau in 1984. A display had a newspaper drawing of a skeleton holding the swastika leading the German people down into an open grave. It came from a time when there was still resistance within Germany toward the insanity of Hitler and the National Socialist movement. The resistance was crushed and the German people were led into the open grave.

It is a story repeated many times over among the peoples of the earth. How blessed are those who have good leaders that lead to life, freedom and peace in the heart as well as in the land. The struggle for such leaders is with us today and will be as long as humans continue to be less than human.

On a personal level, each of us leads others and is led by others to life or death. Think of those who have led you to life--to our true selves and our own voice, to the beauty and goodness waiting to be born through us. Hopefully, we can think of family and friends, neighbors and strangers we meet on the road of life. Then there are the artists, the writers, the composers and filmmakers who search with us and lead us to deeper, more meaningful lives.

We instinctively stay away from little Hitlers—those who dominate, manipulate and deceive. When we don't, we die ourselves and find ourselves leading others into different forms of death. Unfortunately, we are not as quick to notice when we ourselves act like little Hitlers. It may not be on a grand scale but in daily, routine activities.

Whenever a child is told (in so many ways): If you don't do as you are told, I won't love you any more; whenever a woman is taught to feel worthless unless she looks a certain way; whenever a man has to stuff his feelings to be a man; whenever we are so misled or lead, the world turns a little colder and less green. Our environments grow toxic. It is harder to be human, to find rest for our souls or be at home with others. Loneliness and alienation grow. We lose our senses. Slowly and imperceptibly, we are led into wastelands to wither and die inside.

A medieval mystic wrote there is only one fundamental decision in life. It is between suicide and worship—the road to death and the road to life. Her understanding of suicide is much more pervasive and deep than the obvious images of someone shooting themselves or taking too many pills. It lies within all of us to abort ourselves, to give up, to dry up inside. Worship, on the other hand, is in our DNA and flows from our own amazing worth. Here we enter the place of mystery and sacrament. Within us we carry the Divine. “God, the Divine Spirit, is indeed before, within and after all our truest dignity and deepest disquiet.” We don't need to pay for a high speed connection with this Mystery. We are already wired with it from birth.

The religions of the world, when at their best and truest, lead to worship of this abundant, overflowing Goodness at the heart of creation. Churches, synagogues, mosques and all places of worship are to point to the sacredness of the human person. When they don't, they point to death.

In the struggle to stay green and growing, we need each other especially in the winters of our lives. Sure we fail. But we are never finished. No matter what, there is hope for the body we call human. In the Spirit of the Human One from Nazareth, we hear: Do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 1Cor 6:19

The most fundamental and world changing form of worship is the acceptance of our own worth. It is an acceptance that subverts unjust structures and releases us from the prisons of our own making. It is a worth based not on what we have but *who we are* and, if we have the courage to go there, *whose we are*.

I close with a poem written in the struggle to grow.

The Green in Me

ripening takes time
fruit comes slowly
beginning deeply somewhere
in a stretch of sleepy tree

some look to see
what ability I bear
to analyze
and not to care

I grow best
with those who see
not just the slowness
but the green in me

Sold to: Celebration, Pat Marrin, NCR. January 21, 2003, 100.00 dollars.