Beauty and the Beast

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Hebrews 13:5

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

I know that many translations of this verse say not to bring into our conversation concerns about a lack of money and an inordinate desire for worldly wealth. But I tend to agree with those scholars who translate the word ‘covetousness’ as a broader spectrum of thoughts including not only money, but also lust, bigotry, desires, greed, and envy. We can throw in doubt, despair, anger, self-loathing, and all the other dark natures that we as humans carry around with us and experience during our life journey.

It is difficult to manage this darkness as it is, but to speak it in ordinary conversation gives this dark negativity even more power. In fact, we can perseverate on particular self-proclaimed harms and slights to the point that our thinking drains us of love and light and we block ourselves from the Christ that wants to express.

Even if we don’t speak our grievances out loud, we are repeating them over and over in our minds, drowning out God’s Love to the point that we can become a beast. Our wounded self becomes a festering pot of anger, fear, shame, guilt, and judgment; lashing out at those around us for no apparent reason.

The Light of Christ enters our lives when we choose to open the doors and let it flow. Darkness enters when we choose to close our hearts and act from anger, shame, envy, and hurt. When we choose to live from our dark nature often enough it becomes a habit. Each time we choose anger over love we diminish our self a little, and bit by bit, we create a mask of someone who we are not.

There is a French fairy tale published in 1740 by Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve that flirts with this human situation; we know it as “Beauty and the Beast”. A quick synopsis: Handsome Prince is converted into an ugly monster by a fairy because he could not show compassion. Enter Beauty, the youngest of six children. She is lovely of face, mind, and spirit.

The father loses his money. Gets lost in a forest, spends the night in a castle, and innocently picks a rose from the garden for Beauty, which causes the owner of the castle – the Beast – to fly into a rage and says the father must die. In exchange for his life, he is allowed to return home with restored wealth, but Beauty must come and live in the castle in his stead.

After a few months of being treated with respect and kindness by the Beast, Beauty asks to visit her family, and is allowed just one week, and promises to return. She takes with her a magic mirror that allows her to see what the Beast is doing in her absence.

Her sisters are envious of her good life in the castle and convince her to break her promise to the Beast and stay longer than a week. When she uses her mirror to check on the Beast he is half-dead from heartbreak. She returns and weeps over the Beast telling him that she loves him. As the tears fall upon the Beast he is transformed back into the handsome Prince and they live happily ever after. Such is the power of Love in stories and in our lives.

We tend to shy away from our negative natures, concealing what we can and denying the rest. What we must know is that anger and shame get healed through loving the wounded, angry, hurt parts of ourselves. I’ve read where psychologists refer to this as the wounded parts of our Inner Child, that part of our consciousness that retains feelings as they were experienced in childhood. We do not become whole through abandoning and rejecting our dark sides; we become whole through the integration of those natures. We become whole when we accept and love all of who we are.

Through the Christ, we can learn to use to our advantage all of what we consider to be negative. We can become immune to darkness just as we can become immune to diseases. We do this by allowing a small amount of the inert agent that would normally harm us into our being. In other words, as we recognize anger, we can manage it through the love of God, making it inert. Now it becomes an “antibody” that strengthens us. We can become immune to our dark sides when we never act out of our wounded self’s feelings of anger, shame, guilt, judgment, and hurt, but instead always attempt to learn about these feelings as they come up and introduce them to the Light and Love of Christ.

“Hello anger; I see you there.” The Buddhists call it Mindful Attention. The ability to face and be honest about the condition we are in from moment to moment leads to neutralizing the negative effects of our darker natures. Unlike a simple injection for immunity to diseases, this inoculation requires effort, time, practice, and patience to take effect.

But we have a powerful ally on our side – God. We are never on our own and never forsaken. We may feel alone, but there is solitary connection with Spirit that is a blessing. Author Mary Joyce says this:

“Every person is alone in his individuality. Every person is singular in his uniqueness.... But aloneness does not mean isolation or loneliness.... Paradoxically, this sense of aloneness is the true ground for communion with others. The person who receives his aloneness is secure in himself and ready to be open to others without feeling threatened.... And no person can hope to be mature without it... Unless the person receives his own being as a gift, he cannot receive the gift of others... Where true self-fullness is lacking, selfishness, instead of love and charity, appears.”

It is through our aloneness, our singularity, that we express the Christ. God flows through us as an individual; a unique Child of God perfectly suited to do God’s Will. In that sense we are alone, but we are never by our self.

“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

The beauty of our spiritual nature desires to love our human, earthly, beastly nature. Our soul and all that it experiences desires oneness with the body and all that it experiences. We don’t need to kill the beast or even tame it. Our acceptance transforms it.

In the story, Beauty is content with the Beast; she doesn’t criticize or demean him. And the Beast, although rejected numerous times in his asking Beauty to marry him, never pressures her or thinks ill of her. Both grow to be content…until such time that he realizes that he cannot live without her, and she realizes that she loves him.

It reminds me of the man who was complaining that things didn’t go well, when a friend suggested that he “look on the bright side”. The man said, “That’s just it; there is no bright side.” The friend replied, “Then polish up the dark side.”

As we change our thoughts our bodies change, our attitudes change…we change, we polish up our dark side and our entirety shines brighter.

We are the beast; we are the beauty. We are comprised of light and dark, and it is love that solves the puzzle of this duality. As we embrace our dark and light natures, our productive and unproductive aspects, our strengths and weaknesses -- we become whole. Our constant connection and dialogue with the Christ provide answers, which come through the still small voice and inclinations we hear and feel in prayer and other times of receptivity. Love is the key; love is the solution, and God is love.

Let us pray….