

What Love Looks Like

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As some of you know, I was in Honduras a few years ago with Lucy Edwards. A priest there, Padre Melo, had been receiving death threats because of his outspoken work to promote the return of their constitutional government. Lucy and I went down as his *acompanistas*.

One day, after we'd been down there a week or so, we drove with Padre Melo and two other men to the capital city, where the Supreme Court Justices were holding a hunger strike. One of the young men in the truck was a lawyer. The other, Victor, was a campesino, a peasant from a small village, who had been educated by the Jesuits and who was now an organizer for rural peasant communities.

Victor asked me how I had become a Christian minister. That is a hard question to answer in any language, but it was far beyond what I could say in my bad tourist Spanish. The best I could come up with was, I said, *I was kidnapped by God.*

Victor burst out laughing. Then he said, *I too was kidnapped by God.*

That simple phrase has stayed with me, and I've come to see that it was truer than anything I might have said in English. Those of us who walk a faith path end up in surprising places; often we're kidnapped by God.

Some of you here have been kidnapped. I've heard your stories. Some of you are just beginning to suspect that this church thing you thought you were choosing, or as people like to say these days, *church shopping* for, is actually a path, a Way of Living, that sometimes chooses you first.

You come to the uncomfortable awakening that maybe you were chosen. Maybe you were called. Maybe you were kidnapped while you thought you were church shopping. Something walked along your shore and called you. And before your mind could name everything you question, and all the things you don't believe, your heart was taken hostage and sent along a path.

Oops..... We should have warned you. O Wait! We did! Every year we read these gospels as central to our faith. *This* is how the journey begins, we say. You are minding your own business, you are minding your own nets, and Jesus, the Living One, comes by and calls you.

And foolishly, remarkably, trustingly, you follow; you drop everything and join him. It's a crazy way to live, but you can't help it; you've been kidnapped. Or you're just starting to be kidnapped. Something *not your will and not your plans* is moving you closer to God.

Follow Jesus long enough and you start to get good at it. No, that's not true. Follow Jesus long enough and you relax into knowing that it's okay to be bad at it. All of the disciples were terrible. You don't get more skillful; you just get more trusting. You begin to relax into the notion that God calls the broken, not the virtuous and healed, and that messy life you're living can be used.

God isn't waiting for you to get perfect. As Marilyn Gibbons reminded us in the lectionary group, *God will use anything that moves.*

Joanna Niemann sent me an article from *Orion Magazine*—an interview with Tim DeChristopher, the young environmentalist who, desperate to stop the despoiling of Utah public lands by gas and oil companies, went to a BLM auction and outbid the gas and oil companies for the gas and oil leases. He didn't have any money. He just had so much love for the Utah Wilderness he could not stop himself from bidding.

He was there with some friends from his Unitarian church, and as the parcels of land were auctioned off one friend, Krista Bowers, started crying.

DeChristopher said, *It was so clear to me that she was overwhelmed by the heartlessness of this whole scenario. And, you know, when you see a woman crying you feel like you have to do something about changing the situation that's causing that. (Orion Magazine)*

DeChristopher, or, as he was known that day, Bidder #70, was arrested and found guilty on two felony violations of the *Federal Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Reform Act*, and for making false statements. He was

sentenced to two years in a Federal prison, followed by three years of supervised probation.

Minutes before receiving his sentence, DeChristopher delivered an impassioned speech from the courtroom floor. At the end of the speech he turned toward the judge, looked him in the eye and said, This is What Love Looks Like. Then he was handcuffed and taken to jail. (Orion, Jan/Feb 2012)

DeChristopher had been a regular young guy, living his regular life, when in 2008 he heard a climate scientist at the University of Utah lay out her best-case scenario for climate change. What he heard at that talk was that, as he said, if we didn't turn things around by 2015 *we were all pretty much screwed, and we wouldn't even recognize the planet. (Orion)*

I don't know anything about climate change, so I don't know if his understanding is completely accurate or not. But he believed it. He believed it so completely and thoroughly that he went into profound despair before coming to terms with the new idea that there was no hope for a normal future.

He said, Once I realized that there was no hope in any sort of normal future....I realized that I have absolutely nothing to lose by fighting back. Because it was all going to be lost anyway. (Orion)

That was the moment, DeChristopher stopped trying to live the life he imagined he would live, and let himself get kidnapped by God.

That's what happens to these disciples in the gospel reading this morning. Simon and Andrew, James and John, with one call from this strange new Rabbi, drop everything they were or owned, and follow Jesus into the Mystery of a future they cannot imagine. Jesus walks along the shore and calls them. He kidnaps his brothers for God.

And they go on to do the same thing. They pass on the good news that Jesus taught, that the Reign of God, the World God Intends and is in, and is Creating, really is quite near us. That beyond all our hopes, and plans, and fears, what is happening here on planet Earth is held in the arms of

Love Unfolding, and if we want to help that Love unfold, we too must be kidnapped by God.

We don't really put down our future, by the way. DeChristopher is young, and he still doesn't know that. What we put down is our *illusion* that we control our future. We put down our illusions; the future has always been God's.

Who will change their lives when the Good News comes near? Who will make the new world come? We always hope it is others. We are all really sure we're too scared and too busy.

But our faith tradition proclaims again and again that the Reign of God is made Present by people as broken as we are. People *this* messy, people *this* faithless, are the people who get called by God.

God calls us to participate in what Jesus called the *Kingdom*—that place in our world *now* where God is Present and Breaking Out and Calling us to join in. The *Good News* is that God is at work still shaping Creation, and we are invited to help that New World come near. We are invited to drop our selfish petty plans and join in the Big Plan of God.

For some of us that is involvement in the environmental movement; for others, peacemaking: For some, Economic Justice Making, or Civil Rights work; for others working with the homeless, or with victimized women and children. The Good is always unfolding, and we are invited to drop our small plans and join in.

We are invited to lose the life we planned, and join wherever we see God's big plan unfolding, wherever we see World Redemption begin. We all know what Love Looks Like. We're just a little too self-centered and too scared to join it.

Richard Rohr writes:

True religion is always a deep intuition that we are already participating in something very good, in spite of our best efforts to deny it or avoid it. In fact, the best of modern theology is revealing a strong "turn toward participation," as opposed to religion as mere observation, affirmation, moralism, or group belonging. There is

nothing to join, only something to recognize, suffer, and enjoy as a participant. You are already in the eternal flow that Christians would call the divine life of the Trinity.

(Falling Upward)

That's probably too heady to change your life today. I think the gospel keeps it simple: *When you see the Good unfolding anywhere, drop your cheap life and join in.*

That's where the future is, that's where the World-healing is, that's where the Christ is, and, here's something you will not know until you join: that's where the joy is.