

How shall I be? 2-6-17

I started piano lessons when I was 6.

Playing on the upright spinet my mom used back in the 40's.
The first books came and went quickly...

I took my time with the next
as pieces grew in length & difficulty--

By the time I got to middle school,

I found myself secretly unhappy,

My most recent piano teacher demanded
I keep to a completely classical repertoire.

while I longed to be learning at least SOME popular music.

I felt stuck.

And then amid my musical darkness---

There was light.

My middle school music teacher announced

She would be offering a guitar class
during lunch hour for a small group.

She promised we would learn to play
some of the music we were hearing on the radio...

Simon and Garfunkel, the Beatles,
and Peter, Paul and Mary.

It was first come, first serve -- So, I signed up --

There were 10 of us in the class.

On weekends I brought a guitar home and practiced
for an hour or more often with a friend
who was in the class and lived nearby.

Strumming the chords --

down down, up up, down up... down, down, up up down up
eventually, we got better and better --

especially when we played together.

That spring, with a little help from my mom and dad,
I used babysitting money
and birthday money I had saved
to buy myself an inexpensive guitar.

All through high school I played that git-box
Nearly everyday –
It was my quiet time – my way of expressing myself.
I learned to play songs with my Girl Scout troop, at camp.

Many years later,
with a handmade guitar crafted by my uncle
sitting alongside my first well-loved guitar,
My dear friend Sue asked if she could borrow my old guitar
So she could learn to play.

That old git-box -- she was my standby...
But like the guy with two coats in the gospels
– I freely shared that old guitar with someone who had none.

Sue lived in an apartment on Chicago's north side.
A year after I lent her my guitar
it was stolen along with
her stereo equipment, jewelry and her bicycle.

She felt terrible. So did I.
I loved that old guitar. But I loved my friend more.

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Jesus grew up in a devout Jewish home.

*Prayed to God, attended synagogue,
meditated and knew God's Word.*

So, likely, had the disciples and crowds in both of our stories
They were God's chosen people,
who had been living faithfully, following Jewish tradition.

**They were doing what they'd been taught to do
In order to remain right with God.**

They were *Keeping the commandments*,
including remembering the Sabbath, wearing certain clothing,
maintaining purity laws... and more...

This was their response to an almighty God -- **their song...**
And, it was comfortable like an old pair of shoes.

The trouble was all these rules they followed
had the effect of separating them from others.
Separate... like a beacon of God's light in the midst of a city -
with virtual walls and a moat to protect them
from **the sinful world**.

Now... put yourself in the disciple's shoes,
In the heads of the crowds gathered
in the streets of Capernaum, and at Nain's gate.

//// And, here comes this Jesus among them
with a new song.\\\

- *acting in risky, audacious ways.*

Jesus *prayed to God, but, as his Father and friend.*
He showed love for God, but not by remaining separate
Instead, he reaching out and loved people.

All people in his path-

Lepers,

a man with a withered hand in the synagogue on the Sabbath,
the slave of a gentile soldier.

He even reached beyond death
to retrieve a widow's son and return him to her.

Instead of rejecting him, the crowds are growing...
more and more are putting their hope in Jesus.

They see him as a great healer,
not unlike Elijah and Elisha –
ancient prophets who represented God centuries before.

These pillars stood strong against earthly powers
Who lived for their own glory.
Who went against God's call to be the light to others.
God's call for justice, compassion and mercy, for all in need.
Just as Jesus was doing now.

*and, Luke –
by telling us these healing and miracle stories in the way he is,
is showing us how the people respond
to Jesus' message in words and action.*
This radical new way of loving God.

And, the people are responding... **did you hear it?**

A Roman centurion who unlike many of his compatriots
is **kind and humble**.
Who senses who Jesus is and
feels unworthy to ask a favor of this holy one.

Jewish elders who reach beyond the law
and come to request mercy on behalf of this unlikely soldier.

And, there's a widow, feeling doubly cursed –
Can you see her? doubled over in grief
*As she moves amid a large crowd behind her **dead son's stretcher**.*

*Jesus sees her, recognizes her plight on so many levels --
And mercifully heals her every worry **without her even asking**.
Instead, he compassionately tells her **not to weep**.*

And finally, there's the crowd itself,
the people responding by glorifying God and sharing the good news
of the coming of a great prophet among them.

Love has come, a light in the darkness.

And God's children are responding to the light. The new song.
They are *loving others outside their norm.* They are Leaning in.
Breaking rules *that* prevented them
from sharing God's love **with others until now.**

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We know these stories – but **do we hear the deeper message??**

Do we have faith that Jesus came not only for

Those in the gospels –

But to heal *your need, calm your fear*
of failure – of abandonment.

Do we have faith that God brought you here to be part of the
congregation for a reason, whether you were born and have stayed
here or are our newest members.

God has had a hand in it all.

And calls you, in thankfulness **to respond.**

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Jesus feared God and loved his faith,

He loved his religion, his people---

But he loved God and all God's children more.

He came to share God's love

through teaching, through healing, through miracles –

but even more, he came to be present among us.

First in body, and now in spirit.

That he reached across cultural, religious and earthly boundaries
was **audacious**, even **earth shattering then.**

It still is.

God's love is so big, so great,

Anyone who believes can receive it.

Even sinners like you and I **can receive it.**

*It's a love so great that God would send Jesus to die
so that you can not only receive it...*

but, share that love with your neighbors.

Even the ones beyond our city...

When we have faith in God, when we put our trust in God alone

And make God **FIRST** in our lives,

We are called to respond to the love we've received –

By radically singing God's love song to others.

We are meant to **be salt**, to **be light** –

here on the corner of Fletcher and Waters –

not only where we gather to love and practice our faith,

But beyond these doors,

Following Christ's light where he leads us.

bearing Christ's light in the world –

Shattering the me-centered walls and boundaries

our culture has set and constantly setting...

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To follow where Christ leads, takes trust --

It might just mean breaking

a few cultural norms and traditions...

It might mean losing some "thing"

that has become precious to you ---

Something you love--

even **your life as you know it...**

The question is, are you all in?

Are you willing to lay down your life as you know it

To follow this radical redeemer

Who gave up everything for you?

Who shall you be? How shall you live? Amen