

This gospel gives us hope – but first we must be self aware and self awareness demands surrender for it needs to be carefully distinguished from that self awareness which is all about me and nothing to do with God, or others, that self centeredness that leads the Pharisee in today's parable to remain within his own bubble of self- conceit unaware that he has been ' colonised' by other forces .

This is true of most of us, most of the time. We live within a bubble not of our own making, we have a deep history, a psycho-history as it's been called, which blinkers us to our true state, before God, before others. This was prompted by a profound study of why we've so easily sold ourselves to a corporate take on reality where we find ourselves subject to huge money-making ventures over which we seem to have little control, or even desire to control, to change, so embedded are we in a money-making society which seduces us with so many ways of being comforted, at least in the short- term. Alistair McIntosh describes it as follows:

' Many experience a paradox of privilege – we are materially richer than ever before and yet suffer a spiritual poverty that is difficult to pin down. We do not realise how historical forces have shaped the human heart because these things were rarely taught to us; after all ' where there is no victim there was no crime.' In consequence we live (?well), but suffer spiritual death. Our very accomplishments cut us off further from the soul. (page 3 Soil and Soul:People versus Corporate Power 2001).

This seems to sum up the Pharisee's position beautifully, he is self aware but only to the point of self satisfaction – he thanks God not for assisting him in his poverty as a human being but for enabling him to be such a wonderful person, able to enter heaven because of all he has done in God's service. He is in a bubble but doesn't know it, a whole history of bargaining with God through good deeds, of making God the beneficiary of what we do rather than the other way round or worse of seeing one's own wealth and good living as a sign of God's approbation – we live well therefore God is with us. You see how subtle this colonisation of our souls by other forces can become. He's been ' colonised' not by God, but by a false view of God. The tax- collector on the other hand is reduced to a state that goes beyond subtlety – for whatever reason – and we might impute God's prevenient grace here – he knows himself a sinner: he feels it in the depths of his being, nothing comforts him now, he knows himself only in his suffering – I am not who I want to be, God help me. This moment is available to us all but because of our various psychohistories is not often realised, but it is realised in Christ, in whom and through whom God has done for us what we have found so difficult, if not impossible, to do for ourselves. There is no mention of Christ in the parable, there is no need, for Christ speaks the parable to all people whether they become Christians or not, for the deeper truth he is conveying is that the key to salvation is not our religious affiliation and how well we observe it, it is our awareness of our own need of God, our own helplessness before God, our realisation that is, that we are not God after all. This is a surrender which is as shocking in its implications now as it was then – that the righteous might not be righteous after all and that the poor man or woman , stripped of all subtlety, might be closer to God than we are, Christians or not.

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