

The Poetic and Prophetic Path of Servant Disciples

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If you look at a sunset anywhere in the world and let the beauty of the sun kissing the day goodbye sink into your memory, it gives you a poet's mind. If you look at a sunset anywhere in the world and see with clarity the shade of orange and the state of the cloud as a shadow stretches taut, it gives you a prophet's vision. If you look at a sunset anywhere in the world and hope in the sunrise coming, it gives you a disciple's heart.

Poets and prophets live in all of us. It is becoming faithful in loving God that makes poets and prophets disciples. Becoming a disciple means becoming a servant and trusting the spirit will come like the sunrise. All of us are born with everything we need to make the journey. Everyone can see visions: Visions are sight, filled with grace. Everyone can be a poet: Poets are people who see visions and are willing to bear witness to them. Everyone can be a Prophet: Prophets are people who are willing to speak the truth of their visions to the world. But to become a disciple, a hopeful servant of a loving God, takes us a lifetime of sunsets.

Henri Nouwan lectured during his teaching sabbatical in Rome in 1977 that when we reflect on current events we realize that our world is in a continuous state of emergency. He describes violent events he is witnessing and the ongoing terror and war in the Mid East. He says in Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, and Somalia a state of war continues. He says that in the US and many other countries, there is a "discontent about living conditions among millions of people. In Belgrade, a world conference on human rights failed to come to any significant agreements, while more violations are reported from the Soviet Union, Argentina, Paraguay and other countries. The relationships among the powers of the world are deteriorating...and as we approach the end of the second millennium of the Christian era, our world is clouded with an all-pervading fear, a growing sense of despair, and a paralyzing awareness that indeed humanity has come to the verge of suicide." He says it all as the

prelude of his lecture series with a poet's mind with a prophet's vision. He could write that about the state of the world now, thirty years and a thousand sunsets later. What makes the talks memorable, was that such a picture of our world was just the opening, the talks were about living in communion with love through prayer and thought, with the constant hope in the God of love. That is what made him a saint after his death in 1996. It was not having the poetic gift or grand visions about the world. He says those are nothing to him. What meant something was that in the midst of such a vision, God was still present in the small acts of love, in the seemingly mundane tasks of caring for the poor, the sick and the needy.

Isaiah wrote in his first chapter in the eighth century bce, that the faithful city has become a whore. He said, "She that was full of justice, righteousness lodged in her—but now murderers. Your silver has become dross; your wine is mixed with water. Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not defend the orphan, and the widow's cause does not come before them." He continues to prophesize about the desolate state of Judah and Jerusalem until the sixth chapter when he describes a vision of God in the Temple. Isaiah speaks it all with almost enough clarity and passion to move a nation with both a poet's mind with a prophet's vision. He could write that about the state of the world now a million sunsets later. What makes him faithful is that he knew what it meant to be a suffering servant. He kept giving hope like a coming sunrise to the suffering through exile and return. He ends his prophetic career with an invitation to healing, and a promise of help.

This farewell discourse in John is spoken by the poet/ prophet who was capable of loving the whole world. All the visions and poetry are just preludes to the great story unfolding. All the dogma and doctrine that the church founded later are just footnotes, to the call to be loving servants of God. This prayer is a call to trust the spirit like sunrise coming, and to spend our lives learning to serve as disciples.

We could write poetry forever about the subtlety of the pink in

sunsets but if we are not caring for the creation, we are wasting precious paper. We could preach forever, railing against the injustices of the principalities, but if we are not acting to ease one another's burdens, the words are hollow and self-serving. The story of becoming servants of God is unfolding in the great span of time before and after sunsets. It is the story of a practice of love lived out in our individual and communal life.

Isaiah spent his career speaking of his longing and hope for restoration of God's presence in the land. Nouwen ended up leaving his brilliant teaching career to live in Canada in a community with adults who were mentally challenged. He said that it was where he experienced a deep inner conversion. It was where he learned of the all-embracing love of God to people who hunger and thirst for love.

You have a poet's mind and prophet's vision, our hope in coming together is to cultivate the servant's heart and become disciples. As a community we pray to creep toward discipleship. It will take us all of our lives. We have housed women in Magdalene this summer for 10 years, for 3,650 sunsets, and it is a drop in the bucket. What we have learned is that when we are tired or scared, the spirit is there. I have helped bury a dozen women or their family members. Every time I have wondered if we have failed in some way or if the brokenness of the world will be too great. But every time God's spirit is the last word filling me with gratitude and humility and calling us to trust the sunrise is coming. Next week this community will launch a new feeding program called mobile loaves and fishes. If we are faithful we will serve food for the rest of our lives. It will be a journey to learn how to love better.

We are given a certain number of sunsets in our lives to witness and inspire. At our last sunset, which is not so far away, we can trust that beyond the boundaries of this life, we will find our way to love itself. It is that truth that makes the path of servant hood poetic and prophetic. It is that truth that makes it all so beautiful. If we want to live a faithful life, it will be by a daily practice of loving the world in the company of the spirit. That is the poetic and prophetic teaching of our Lord to us.