

Meditation: "wHoly Compassionate"

Conrad Hyers says "Humour is not the opposite of seriousness, humour is the opposite of despair."

In Jesus' time, Judaism was under threat by Greco-Roman culture. Caesar's image was engraved on coins. In fact, Caesar claimed to be divine, the son of God, and the saviour of the world. All of these claims, along with the engraved likeness of Caesar on the coins would have been heretical to the Jews.

There were various responses to the Roman occupation. There were fanatical freedom fighters - the zealots. There was also a group called Pharisees. They thought that the way to liberate Israel from Roman occupation was to atone for the sins of the people, which had obviously brought the Roman occupation as punishment by God. Only strict adherence to the holiness code would please God, and convince God to give the Romans the boot. There was a problem with the Pharisaic ethos and politics of holiness.... It was exclusionary. It excluded not only the Romans and other gentile groups, but also Jews who found it difficult to keep the strict requirements of the holiness code. It may have been that they lacked the time to follow all of the regulations due to the fact that they had to work, and work long hard hours just to make enough to feed their families and pay the Roman taxes. It may have been that they lacked the financial resources to not only feed their families and pay the Roman taxes, but also to pay the temple taxes in addition. Whatever the reason, strict adherence to the holiness code was exclusionary to a large percentage of Jews.

It was in that social, political, and religious reality that Jesus carried out his ministry. Jesus' ministry followed a different path that the

path of either the Pharisees or the Zealots. Jesus' ethos and politics were of compassion. Jesus talked with, touched, socialized with people that the Pharisees would not have been caught dead with: lepers, prostitutes, tax collectors (Roman collaborators). Where the Pharisees' ethos of holiness was exclusionary, Jesus' ethos of compassion was inclusive. Jesus included everyone in his ministry, from Roman Centurions, to demon possessed gentiles (Gerasene demoniac), to lepers, to children, to women, to.... you name it.

The question is, is God primarily Holy, or primarily Compassionate?

In our time, Christianity is under threat from consumer culture, and extreme politics of division and personal rights taken to the extreme. Some are responding with an ethos of holiness (religious, or political) What I wonder is, would an ethos of humour be better?

Humour and compassion are linked. Humour is the opposite of despair. Humour is not about laughing all your troubles away. It is not a means of avoiding the real issues of personal life and social injustices. It is one of the tools God has given us to deal with such issues. Humour is the ability to not take ourselves too seriously, but to laugh at ourselves, and our foibles. Humour is primarily directed inward. Compassion is the flip side of the coin. Compassion is humour directed outward, aimed toward another. Where humour helps us bear the unbearable, compassion looks at the other and helps us help the other to bear what the other finds unbearable. Compassion, like humour, is the opposite of despair.

Compassion is not the opposite of holiness, rather, it is holiness taken to a deeper level. It is seeing the other as we are, a child of God who created all life, and therefore holy.

The question is: Do you see God as primarily Holy, or primarily compassionate?

Go and live that out!