Challenge 26 of 40

Reflection by Eddie Hypolite - Cooranbong, Australia

For a number of years now, my mantra has been "Christianity is a lived experience!" It has been my guiding map, helping me to navigate the complex terrain of human relationships and expectations. At major crossroads when people have failed me and I them, it has proven to be the only way I've been able to make sense of the grey areas of life and faith. The reading of God's word informs my faith and beliefs, but it's in the living of life that God affirms those beliefs and gives them meaning in realtime.

A few months ago, I met a woman at a feeding program that our church supports. We began to talk and share life and journey with each other! She spoke of her struggle with the pain her joints were suffering as a result of early onset arthritis and the resulting forced early retirement. I asked her what it was that gave her such a positive outlook on her situation, to which she replied, "Others have it worse and there's always a bigger picture."

It struck me as providential that she used that phrase "a bigger picture" because I was about to begin a three-week preaching series called, 'The Bigger Picture,' and I told her about it. As I helped her pack her car with the food she had collected that morning, she expressed a desire to come hear my sermon on, "The Bigger Picture." She came to church that week; actually she's been coming every week since. She brought her daughter with her a few weeks later, a beautiful lady in her early 30's. We have quickly become family and the journey has been real. Both mother and daughter carry loads, laid on them by time, bad
decisions, and unexpected and unprepared for events which have all taken their toll.

In the midst of all of this is their vocal belief, which has shifted from the result of 'Karma' to 'the intervention of God,' that God has brought our paths and lives into connection! The result being, her daughter, after attending our women's conference, decided to get out of an abusive long-term relationship and check herself into rehab and get clean!

The mother wants to have Bible studies and go deeper with God and her life with Him. She lives in a socio-economically poor area, with a high suicide rate among teenagers and young adults, and she wants to open her home as a support outreach that our Church can use to help the community. I tell both their stories with their blessing and support knowing that they have come a long way, with such a long way still to go!

I love Jesus Christ, I love Him for the simple reason that we matter to Him! Despite our journey, background, and issues, we still matter to Him!

I love Him for the way He makes Himself known in the lives of His people and translates that in real terms to the lives of those searching for Him.

I love the fact that He is able to make lives intersect over time and in ways, that it becomes evident to all that "God is with us" and we matter.

These two stories represent so many stories taking place all around us everyday. Because Jesus lives and is present with us through His Spirit, our life in Him is a lived experience, ever growing, ever renewing, ever transforming, ever learning and unlearning. He speaks in both new and familiar terms and what is the heart of His message? That He is with us.

The reality of God being with us can be something of a paradox at times. Our pathway isn't always clear, hills get steeper, and the journey through valleys seems to last longer than normal sometimes. In those situations, our want of a genie-in-a-lamp god outweighs our need for the ever-present, in-all-our-bad-situations God He declares Himself to be, but 'God is with us.'

Christianity is truly a 'lived experience' that can only be understood in all the high and low places of life, for that is where God consistently and persistently meets us.

God is with us…

Recalibrate

1) Trace and name the places in 2014 that God made your life intersect with someone in such a way that you sensed God was in the encounter.

2) Make a list of 5 not-so-obvious things in your life or the lives of those you love, that
says “I/we matter to God.” Then thank God for each of them.

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