

For the Journey

May 20/26 - Rev. Dave Crawford



*“We do not think ourselves into new ways of living,
we live ourselves into new ways of thinking.”*

- **Richard Rohr, Franciscan priest, author, founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, N.M., 1987.**

Rohr’s way is not, I would argue, the way of the world. The field of psychology, for example, is built on the ideal of understanding the human psyche and then providing suggested behavioural solutions; exploring the depths of our life experiences, recently or long ago, which have shaped our unwanted behaviours, feelings or actions as adults in the present. A broader perspective on why we think certain things about ourselves and the world around us, and how those thoughts influence our actions now, positive and negative, helps the patient sort out different ways of living, grounded in new thinking about the self.

Similarly, the Christian way is not the world’s way. The paradox of the Christian life is expressed in the balancing act we seek to achieve - the good news of God’s free gift of grace in Jesus Christ, yet grace which inevitably leads to the hard work of discipleship. Jesus preached of the in-breaking kingdom of God into our world yet also assured his followers that they’d have to deny themselves, take up crosses, and follow behind him into whatever unknown joys and heartaches lay ahead in their commitment to his movement. God’s love inspiring good works in praise of God, God’s faithfulness to us, to humankind, compelling our service to others and to God.

Sometimes we simply don't *feel* Christian, however, and despite our sincere attempts to regain a sense of connection or attachment to the spiritual side of faith, or what we imagine to be the spiritual side, we can't seem to get there. There are no quick fixes, no online memes or 30-second Facebook vids to solve our malaise. Perhaps our error, if there is one, comes in expecting faith, real, authentic faith will translate into the kinds of inner feelings we desire, and assume should accompany our Christian journey.

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), French mathematician, inventor, and part-time theologian, in his only book on Christianity, "Pensees" or "Fragments", (the fragments of his writings and notes compiled into a book, posthumously), suggested, and I'm paraphrasing, that *"If a Christian is struggling with faith, with belief, and with feeling like a Christian, the best solution to the problem is to act like a Christian!"* More thinking isn't the answer. Action is the answer. If you don't feel like praying, pray more often not less. If public worship fails to move the spirit, attend worship more often not less. And if your own intellectual concerns over your lagging feelings of faith persist, get out of your intellect and get busy helping the less fortunate, feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, as Jesus himself would do. Then see how your faith is affected. This prescription for arousing faith by living the faith goes against the grain of our thinking on such matters, but our thinking may be the problem perhaps, the stagnation of overthinking, the assumptions we're taught about what inspires goodness in the human soul and life. An old friend argued once that "she had to get better at loving herself before she could properly reach out to love others", which is both inaccurate and unChristian.

To live ourselves into new ways of thinking and being. I've tried it at times. Many millions of others have likely also given it a whirl, although I haven't done a survey. What I'm attempting to claim is that it works.

Last word - Jesus didn't say much about immersing ourselves in contemplation and thinking, did he? He did say a great deal, however, about putting his teachings into action, about manifesting his Father's kingdom ways in our living, about welcoming the outcast, loving the unlovable, affirming those pushed down by society, and doing all this not in our heads or hearts, not through our un-acted-upon good intentions, but with our hands and feet, our time and effort and maybe our resetting of priorities.

Grace and Peace,
Rev. Dave