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WHOSE FAULT IS IT?

Years ago I read a story of some geology students at a university, possibly Cal Tech, that had discovered three new geologic faults on the grounds of the campus. Being the discoverers, they had the right to name the faults, and chose the names My, Your, and Our. These students, wittingly or un-, identified a fact of life—we all have faults. We are created by a faultless God, but in giving us choice he allowed us faults.

A geologic fault, in layman's terms, is a line where two land masses come together. Since the surface of the earth is really floating on a vast ocean of molten rock, anywhere there is a fault there is the possibility of sudden movement. If the masses move apart enough to allow some of the molten rock or gases escape we have the beginnings of a volcano. Here in Albuquerque, New Mexico, the west side of town is in the shadow of three such prominences, known as Butte, Black, and Ja. Although they have been inactive for just under a thousand years, they are evidence of the possibility of further upheavals in the land.

When two land masses do not separate, but merely scrape along each other suddenly, we have an earthquake. These can be mild or severe. California is waiting for "the Big One" to destroy it.

Since we humans have our own faults, we have the potential for our own brand of volcanoes and earthquakes. We are floating in a vast ocean of society. Sometimes we come against another human in such a way that we collide. This builds up pressure, which may erupt in a volcano of anger or result in "rubbing the wrong way" and causing a "people-quake."

It would seem obvious to some that if we never dealt with other people, then we wouldn't have these quakes. This has never been a successful way of dealing with the problem. You see, the faults are within us, not just between us. A hermit still has to deal with himself. The stereotypical hermit doesn't know how to react in a civil manner. This shows the value of reacting with other people. Although the quakes come, we learn to react in ways to ease the tensions that could result in a massive blow-up. When we isolate ourselves, we don't have the advantage of "blowing off steam."

We have to live with people, with all of their faults (and all of ours). Scripture gives us insight into

reducing the damage from the resulting people-quakes.

Paul writes that the way to prevent volcanoes is to limit their power to a single day. "Be angry, and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath." (Eph 4:26) The power of a volcano is built up pressure. If we don't hold on to a grudge, the pressure doesn't build to destructive proportions.

Jesus offered two ways to ease the power of a people-quake. The first method is prayer. "I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." (Matt 5:44)

When two people begin to rub against each other, sometimes one is unaware of the problem. That is when the second method comes into play. The shortened version is "go, take, tell."

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, **go** and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then **take** with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, **tell** it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. (Matt 18:15-17, emphasis mine)

When one does not follow the approved methods for relieving interpersonal stresses, the potential for damage increases. We each have our faults. Sometimes those faults cause earthquakes in our relationships. When that happens, let us keep it small, with no aftershocks. Lord, keep our faults from causing "the big one."

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COMING AND GOING

Every reader of the Bible, casual or serious though they may be, seems to have a favorite passage. To many it is the 23rd Psalm. Although John 3:16 is one of the most often quoted, I would venture to say that fewer would call it a favorite passage than would quote it. Others, when asked what their favorite passage would be, might answer that it depends on the day, or even the hour. Their favorite depends often on their mood or circumstances. I have long considered the first part of John 14 to be one of my favorites. I even risked my teaching career, short-lived as it turned out to be, before it even started by doing an interpretive reading of that passage before a speech class I was student teaching.

We don't always know exactly why a passage resonates with us. I think, though, that I like this passage for the promises Jesus gives us in it, and the hope. I wish, therefore, to look at the passage in detail, and show why so many people have taken comfort and hope in it.

Let not your hearts be troubled

Jesus begins what will be his final discourse with what some interpret as comfort and others as a command.

Worry means we have forgotten that "my father is bigger than your father."

"Let not your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me."

It is not uncommon for Jesus to tell his followers not to worry. Anxiety seems to be the antithesis of Jesus' teachings.

"Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." (Matt 6:34)

"And he [Jesus] arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?" (Mk 4:39-40)

His disciples continued these thoughts. Listen to the words of Paul.

"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." (Php 4:6)

Some people would say that the opposite of faith is unbelief. This is not entirely true. Jesus says the opposite of faith is worry. The reason for worry is a lack of faith. The reason he gave his apostles for them not to be troubled here in John 14 was, "you believe in God." If you believe in God, and subsequently in Jesus, you have no reason to worry. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31)

Faith/trust is possible because "my father is bigger than your father." Worry is an indication that, at least for a moment, we have stopped believing that. We stop believing in the ability of Jesus to walk on water, to heal the sick, or to come out of the grave. At the time Jesus said this he had not yet revealed the power of resurrection. However, that would soon be evident to the apostles. Within days of this command not to be troubled in heart, he proved why he could ask it of his followers.

Many mansions

Because the Greek language generally does not use as much punctuation as English, there are two common translations of the next section of John 14. I am not thoroughly convinced that it makes a big difference which version you prefer, but I present them both here.

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. (KJV)

In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you. And when I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. (RSV)

The first thing Jesus says here is a matter of comfort to many. If many others believed it, it would be a matter of concern. He says his father's house has many rooms/mansions/dwelling places. The word he uses to describe the dwellings is the same word Paul uses to tell us that the Holy Spirit dwells within us.

In the medical and hospitality industries, the number of beds is an important statistic. Hospitals are rated by the number of beds. Hotels may advertise the number of beds or the number of rooms. In fact, the more rooms a hotel has, the higher the room rate we generally let them get away with. Jesus says that God's hospital is a many-bed facility. His hotel has enough rooms for everyone who may check in; there is never a "no vacancy" sign.

Occasionally somebody plans a big event, such as a wedding. When there are a lot of out-of-town guests they have to worry about housing them all. If someone decides at the last minute to attend they may worry that there will not be housing. Jesus says we don't need to worry about that. His Father has a large enough house for everyone.

There are groups that say that heaven will house 144,000 souls, and the rest of us will live on a new earth. If that were true, I would worry about whether the number for heaven was filled up a few hundred years ago. After all, I would rather be in the group that lives close to God, rather than those who don't. Jesus says I don't need to worry about that. Even a latecomer will find room in God's house. Moreover, if someone decides at the last minute of life that they want to go there, there is room.

Whichever of the two translations you accept, the next point is that we can trust what Jesus says, and he said that as surely as that he was going, he would come again for his followers. Just as God is trustworthy, Jesus could be believed. Whichever thing he was talking about, the fact of the abode or the fact of his going, if it were not so, Jesus would have told us the truth.

As comforting as the fact of a place of abode may be, that is meaningless without two other facts. Jesus will go, and he will come again.

There could be all possible room for us in heaven, but if Jesus had not gone to prepare a way then it would be as empty as a ski lodge in summer. When Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place," the word generally translated "go" has a very specific meaning. Instead of just meaning "to go" it carried the idea of completing a mission, and usually meant departing this life. The literal meaning is to lead over. So here Jesus is predicting his death in a couple of days. More importantly, he is saying that his death, as a sacrifice for sin, will open the way for us to go where he is going. Because he was going to die, we could live. Because he was going to lead the way, we could follow him home

Jesus was going to God. The way there was through death. The way for us to follow Jesus to God is through the likeness of his death.

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his

death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. (Rom 6:3-5)

Not only would he die, he would come again. He will come again to judge the world. What he may have been telling his apostles, though, was that he would not only die, but rise from the dead. Just as his death gave us the forgiveness of sins so that we can be with God, so also his resurrection lets us know that we may live again. "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." (1 Cor 15:17)

You know the way

"And you know where I am going, and you know the way there."

God's hotel never has a "no vacancy" sign.

Thomas spoke for most of us in answer to this statement. "Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Like many of us, Thomas was confused. He thought in concrete terms. If you are going somewhere, we can't know where unless you tell us.

The word for "go" in this verse is different from the one in the previous verse. Where that meant to lead over, this time it means to lead under, or simply depart. Now he is not talking about how he was to go, but is emphasizing the path. After his talk of death, this was confusing to Thomas.

Jesus said they knew the way, because he was the way. If you don't know Jesus, you don't know the way to God. It is that simple. He continued, "No man comes to the Father but by me." That is pretty specific. No man means nobody. There are not many paths to God. There is only one. If that is narrow-minded, then I am glad to be narrow-minded, because God is.

Jesus offered his disciples comfort. Comfort is a place to come home to. Comfort is a friend to open the door. Comfort is a well-traveled path to the door. Jesus offered, and offers all these. No wonder he said, "Let not your heart be troubled."

THIS IS THE DAY

One of the more popular of the newer “praise songs” is based on Psalm 118: 24—“This is the day that the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” Unfortunately, I think that by taking it out of its context like this most people misunderstand the real meaning of the verse. Most people take it to mean to rejoice in each day we are given because our very lives, our very days, are given to us by the Lord. While this is a true sentiment, it is not what the Holy Spirit meant when he inspired the psalmist to write that.

One of the essential rules for interpreting any scripture is to take it in its context. While this applies to the historical context as well, it especially pertains to the surrounding text. To learn what the verse itself means, then, we must look at the verses around it.

Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord: This gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter. I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord: O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord: we have blessed you out of the house of the Lord. (Ps 118:19-26)

This psalm is a prayer for deliverance. This section is about deliverance from unrighteousness. It appears several times in the New Testament writings. What those writers have to say about this passage must be taken into account as well, if we want to understand even the one verse of the psalm.

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The last part of the passage quoted above may be familiar because of its use on an occasion six months away from when it was normally heard. (See “A Celebration Out of Time” in *Minutes With Messiah*, October, 2000.) “Hosanna [Save now, I beseech thee] to the son of David. Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” (Matt 21:9) This was the cry of the people as Jesus entered Jerusalem, a week before his crucifixion. This use of the “Great Hosanna” was not accidental. Matthew is showing us that this psalm was associated with the coming of the Messiah.

The verses immediately before the verse in question are also associated with Messiah. Speaking of Jesus, Peter wrote (1 Pet 2:7) “Unto them which are disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made head of the corner.” Jesus applied the verse to himself (Mk 12:10; Lk 20:17; Matt 21:42). “The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?”

If the verses immediately before and after “this is the day” were applied directly to Jesus as the Messiah, then surely this verse has the same application. The day in question is not each “today” of our lives, but a much longer day. This is a day that does not last twenty-four hours, but rather has lasted for over two thousand years. This is the day of Messiah, the Messianic Age.

The psalmist was asking for deliverance, from his enemies and from unrighteousness. He looked to a day when his salvation would come. We are in that day. We have salvation made readily available to us, through the sacrifice of the Son of God. This day of salvation is the day which the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad we live in the age of Messiah.