

IMITATION ON AISLE NINE

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One by one we moved the cans of beans and corn from her broken shopping cart to ours. When the transfer was complete my mother leaned over, held the woman's gray bobbing head still and kissed her thin wrinkled cheek. "Love you. Have a good day," mom whispered just loud enough for the three of us to hear. Then, wiping a tear from her own smile dimpled cheeks, my mother stepped behind what had been the busted cart and continued down the cereal aisle, fighting it's motionless front wheel all the way.

I looked back at the old woman, pushing our former cart with ease, with the kind of awe reserved for last second wins in Super Bowls or a cheerleader on the arm of a chess team president. This was miraculous. I knew it.

My mother's not an Anabaptist but she lives like one. The Anabaptists, I recently discovered, believe a true Christian faith has three-dimensions and that a faith with fewer is no faith at all.

- We know and love ourselves: We're self-aware. We read Paul's confession that he's the "chief of all sinners" and admit, "me too." We understand where we stand without God and mourn it (Matthew 5:3,4). We're thankful for where we stand with God, we're His children, in Christ. He's "well pleased" with us.
- We know and love God: While we can't know all of who God is on earth, we're given a spiritual hunger and ability to increasingly understand and obey Him (Matthew 5:6, Ezekiel 36:27). He shows us His backside, reveals Himself in creation (Romans 1:19,20), whispers and shouts from His written words and from his people (John 16:13). He wants to be known.
- We know and love others: If we love God we love people. If we don't love people we don't love God (1 John 4:20). God moves us to imitate His love on earth (Matthew 5:7-9, Luke 10:27, 28). This love erupts out of us into concern and care for neighbor and enemy alike, for the just and unjust (Matthew 5:43-48). We become imitators of God, closer to perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect, by loving the way He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

The greatest gift my mother and Anabaptist theologians have given me is an understanding of the Christian faith as 3-D. Unlike the theologians, mom didn't live and think in three dimensions because a seminary professor told her too or because she'd exegeted the scripture and parsed the Greek necessary to conceive such a theology. No, I suspect she just believed the story of Jesus

enough to imitate Him. That, I believe, is saving faith. Faith that imitates. Live faith that “works” the way Jesus worked. Imitation. This is where Anabaptists got their theology and my mom got the idea to swap carts with a woman on aisle nine.

Jesus knew Himself obviously, and constantly went about helping others see themselves more clearly, aiding them in becoming aware of their need and abundance. He called Peter Satan and then The Rock. He called John beloved. And Jesus experienced the full range of human emotion and life too - from mourning the loss of a friend to holy rage in the Temple and even jubilation at a wedding celebration. He dove into His humanity and helped us realize ours.

We imitate Him by simply being human and cognizant of all that means - the bitter and the sweet.

Jesus knew God as well. He was in relationship with Father and Spirit, co-Creator with them, dependent on both, answering to One, speaking and listening to his family the Trinity. He was in relationship with Divinity. He submitted, gained power from, spoke on behalf of, and embodied the Godhead. Apart from I AM He was nothing.

We imitate Christ by being dependent icons of God on earth.

Jesus’ knowledge of His own humanity gave Him empathy for and connection with ours. He met the sorrowful with tears in His eyes. He celebrated with the joyful with a face creased by a thousand smiles. His relationship with Divinity gave Him power and wisdom to transform and heal and correct and encourage the humans He cried and danced with everyday.

Jesus went beyond knowing humanity and knowing God to knowing people. And loving them. And the invitation He gave was “follow me” - imitate. To know and love Christ is to imitate Christ by knowing and loving people.

This three-pronged mimicry of Christ changes believers into disciples. This changes marriages into ministries. Changes radio stations into agents of community renewal. Changes rock stars into servants and labels into partners.

Three-dimensional faith changes grocery stores into sanctuaries. I’ve seen it.