

## By faith together

T.S. Eliot wrote in “The Wasteland”,

April [not this month, obviously] is the cruellest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.  
Winter kept us warm, covering  
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding  
A little life with dried tubers.

I guess what he is talking about there is the place of hope in human experience. And, sometimes, hope can feel uncomfortable, because it may awaken us out of routine.

The routine, as Jesus describes it in Matthew’s gospel, is one where people do not practise what they preach, where people look for acclaim and esteem from others, and where people are burdened with things that they feel can be accomplished only with great difficulty.

So that is, perhaps, the usual state of affairs that we may find ourselves in. But, into that situation, Jesus speaks words of hope.

For example, he says, “But you are not to be called ‘rabbi’, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. Now, it’s not explained in Matthew’s gospel what the “teacher” could be. It could be the Messiah; it could be Jesus himself. It could be the Holy Spirit. And I’m going to take that line of interpretation—that the Holy Spirit is the one teacher. “Call no one your father on earth; for you have one Father, the one in heaven.” “Nor are you to be called ‘instructors’ [“catechists”, literally—people who expound]; you are not to be called ‘instructors’, because you have one instructor, the Messiah.” So, into a situation where hope appears with difficulty, Jesus actually provides such hope.

And so, instead of a relationship with God based on externals and also of not practising what we preach, we have, in the person of the Spirit of God, one who concerns himself with our whole being, our interior being, so to speak, in such a way that we can live fully in obedience to God, and also to pray to God as Jesus did, as Father.

Of course, we are talking about Matthew’s gospel. You may remember that Matthew’s gospel includes the Sermon on the Mount. And, there, we find a very strong emphasis on the inner person. Of course, when Jesus was confronted by people who had an obsession with washing of hands and pots and whatever else, and he said, “Really, the issue is what’s inside a person”—on the basis of that, we can also understand some of Jesus’ other remarks, such as “You have heard the commandment, ‘You shall not kill’; but I say to you, ‘Do not be angry with your neighbour’.” The focus is on the interior attitude. “Or, you have heard it said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’; but I say to you, ‘You shall not look lustfully at a woman’.” Or, “you are to fulfil the vows that you make, the oaths that you make; but I say to you, “Do not swear at all. Simply be a truthful person.”

The Spirit is our Teacher. And the Spirit calls us into a type of relationship with God which is not merely external (and then the internal is at odds with that). The Spirit is such that the Spirit transforms our lives in such a way that we are truthful, respectful of the other sex, and not governed by anger.

The Spirit also enables us to be in relationship with God, so that we can call, as the apostle Paul said, “Abba, Father”. We can pray the Lord’s prayer along with Jesus, “Our Father, who art in heaven.”

So, in the midst of situations where hope seems to be lacking, Jesus says, “Don’t let anyone be called ‘rabbi’, because you have one teacher.” And the teacher could be himself. But the teacher could also be the Holy Spirit who has a big impact on our lives, for life, for freedom, for being called into being children of God.

Jesus also mentions that we are not to call anyone, “Father”, because we have one Father, the one in heaven. Now, in the Old Testament, in the Book of Proverbs, you can read sayings such as, “Son, be attentive to my teaching...” So there is a background in the Old Testament of the father being a teacher, or at least the teacher standing in for the “father” for his students.

In any case, God is the one Father, the one in heaven, who wishes us to keep on the narrow path, to keep us away from ways of life that take us away from obedience to him, who disciplines us to this end, who also wishes to give us responsibility. The apostle Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, is astonished that the Corinthian Christians can’t solve the smallest of problems in the Christian community. And he says to them, “Do you not know that you are going to judge angels?” And this sense of responsibility that God gives us, as his children, who are brought up to be that way, is echoed in Jesus’ parable of the pounds or the talents. The parable indicates that the landowner gives to one servant  $x$  number of pounds or talents, and to the other two, another number. But those servants who actually make something of what they are given are commended, and they are told that the landowner is now putting them over even greater responsibility. So God’s intent for us is not to people who are put down, who act like infants. God, rather, calls us into maturity, into being more fully his children in the world, even people who pray for their enemies. These are the people who are children of their heavenly Father.

So, in the midst of situations where hope may be thin, where people not only do not practise what they preach, but also look for the attention of others, and try to put others down, put them in their place, instead, in the person of God, we have a Teacher who gives us responsibility, who indeed directs us to the way in which he would lead our lives; but also wishes us to come to fuller maturity, after the image of his Son.

In this passage from Matthew’s gospel, it also indicates, “Nor are you to be called ‘catechists’ or ‘instructors’; you have one Instructor, the Messiah.” And, of course, Matthew’s gospel emphasizes, in particular, Jesus as Teacher, as Instructor.

And, perhaps, among all the teachings that we could refer to, we could maybe take a look at Jesus’ saying, found in Matthew’s gospel,

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Well, in contrast to a manner of life in which we feel burdened, and where everything is extremely difficult, and where others may make our lives, in fact, difficult, or where we may do the same with our neighbour—into that sort of situation, we find Jesus, who calls us into the way of faith.

Now, the way of faith is a challenge to us. Jesus himself lived that life—the way of faith. He calls us into that same life, that same way. And that sometimes means giving up, and being brave, as I indicated to the young people, a little bit earlier. It means learning the new path that God has for one, and following in that course. It doesn't mean remaining ever the same, doing everything exactly the same.

By being open to faith, taking up our cross and following him, losing our life for the sake of the gospel, we find it. By means of faith, we find the life that God has for us. Thanks to the “Catechist”, the “Instructor”, Jesus, we receive also this other teacher, the Spirit, who awakens in us a genuine relationship with God. We are put in touch with the Father, who disciplines us, but also leads us into the maturity he wants for us.

Well, T.S. Eliot explained a situation where hope may seem to be an uncomfortable feeling within us. We just want to let things be. We don't want to be disturbed by “springtime”, by the newness associated with the hope that God would share with us in our lives, through Jesus Christ.

But we are people of hope. We are people whom God disturbs sometimes, out of our complacency, in order to be more fully the children he would have us be.