

October 2005

Transformation One Moment at a Time

Dear Theophilus,

I am writing to you on an unseasonably warm October afternoon. One of the many spiritual disciplines urges us to live in the moment and I am certainly finding that easy to do on a day such as this. And in this moment I want to share a few thoughts.

Mercifully, loyal Cleveland Indian fans won't have to live or die on every pitch any longer! It would have been fun, of course, but the tension built up so much to where a number of people told me they couldn't watch the games any longer.

Why am I talking about the Indians? The team will try again to get it right for next year, working harder, bringing in different people, and urging the fans to support them. Doesn't this sound like the church? We always hope that next year will be better if we just work harder or get some new people or find a way to get every member to support what we're doing. But God doesn't work that way. Grace doesn't work that way. And we're finding out more and more that church doesn't work that way either.

If I have learned anything over the past several years, especially on this journey funded by the Lilly Foundation which is seeking the clues to transforming the local church, it is that transformation does not happen through any one program. Believe me, I've attended many events where the presenters feel they have *the* program that will transform us all. I remain skeptical. Transformation will not come through any program or by working harder or by getting new people. If anything, it will happen the way we read about it happening in the Bible, by God working through our lives and asking us to change and calling us to open our eyes to life around us and urging us to be an example of Christ's presence, not tomorrow, or when we feel like it, or when it seems right, but right in this very moment.

Not sure how to go about it? You might first try coming to worship for it is here that we try to open ourselves to the presence of God. Not sure worship does that for you? Then come and meet people like yourself who are searching for those "thin places," as the ancient Celtic people called them, where the space between God and us is very thin. Still feel distant from God? Then it may be through a stranger that God is at work. To leave the comfort zone of LCPC and family and tradition and meet the stranger out there somewhere, in a coffee shop, on the street, at work, in school, even here at church, may teach us about our own biases and anxieties and perhaps even our own understanding of God.

And I guess there's not a more perfect day to do this. Not because of how gorgeous it is (who's complaining now about Cleveland weather!), but because it is the only time we have, at this moment. To the Indians, wait until next year. For us, why wait at all?

Grace and peace,

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