

SESSION FOUR // The Very Good Gospel with Lisa Sharon Harper

Watch Film

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/the-very-good-gospel>

Going Deeper

Harper suggests that the gospel is the longing of our soul. Spend some time getting quiet, settling your breath and experiencing connectedness with God. Feel into your deepest self for a minute. Reach in and see if you can hear what your soul is longing for. Before you get busy with “the next thing”, write about your experience.

Harper talks about coming off a long pilgrimage to a spiritual awakening and a frightening realization: the gospel, as she understood it, “was mute in the face of evil”. What is your understanding of the gospel? How does your understanding of the gospel measure up to the greatest evils of our time?

Harper mentions Volf’s distinction of “thin” faith and “thick” faith.² Where do you see the fruits of “thin” faith? Where do you see the fruits of “thick” faith? What conversations can you cultivate around the idea of growing more textured communities with deep, “thick” faith?

Harper says “Scripture does speak really good news for the world today...it is wrapped up in connectedness.” Use one of your quiet times with God acknowledging your connectedness. You can use a simple statements such as: “I am connected to God. I am connected to myself. I am connected to my spouse. I am connected to this flower. I am connected to all flowers.” Just see where it takes you. Leave enough time for you to write about your experience before moving on to the next thing of the day.

Reflection

In following the Jesus way, in following the Way of good news, this world can be healed.—Lisa Sharon Harper

Harper’s description of her faith not measuring up is reminiscent of a dark night of the soul. Periods of time where we as faithful people wrestle with God for the meaning of life. Ecclesiastes stuff. It’s a gift, to be honest, to pilgrimage through the

² To watch films with Miroslav Volf: theworkofthepeople.com/person/miroslav-volf

darkest horrors of humanity and emerge with empty hands. With a vacancy. With nothing.

No thing.

If you haven't gone through such a trial of faith, I will tell you life feels pretty numb and bleak. I wandered down hallways of "why do bad things happen?", dodged head-on traffic on the roaring highways of "what is wrong with me", and floated atop still waters wondering "how will I ever...?" I wouldn't be honest with you if I didn't admit that I feared I was going off the deep end alone.

I used to attend a small Celtic Christian community that met once a month. It was in this beloved handful of people that light came through. During one service by candlelight, they led us through an ancient practice called the *Via Negativa*, a prayer practice used to expand one's scope of God by negation—admitting what God is not.³ Through this prayer practice, the group came to the point of negation where we admitted "God is no thing."

No thing.

Wait. Something in this was feeling familiar. In the dark hollow of where I had taken up residence, I felt a spark ignite. God as no thing. Maybe this is too far out for an online discussion where we cannot dialogue and share more, but I tell you in that moment I felt the warmth of Love—it didn't flood in like you might imagine Hollywood would write it, but it burned consistently in the small space I allowed it. God as no thing. Even when I felt like I was outside of all relationship, even detached to much of myself, I had not fallen outside of relationship to God. I began to wonder if my waywardness wasn't still following the "Way of good news"...because I discovered it in the hollows.

Connection.

Connection is what every soul longs for. Even with the "no thing" that overtakes you. Feeling it, and taking part in it is to fully experience humanity and texturizes text-book faith. I don't want to romanticize depression, or any terrorizing times—or any assault from within and without. I just want to acknowledge that some of us at some time will find ourselves there feeling forsaken and alone.

³ I also mention this practice in more detail in the curriculum for Richard Rohr's Divine Dance series on TWOTP: theworkofthepeople.com/person/richard-rohr

If, as Harper suggests, the good news is connection, and if Jesus' Way is the good news, then what we are following, in essence, is connection. The Way is connection. Connection to God, Self, others, our environment. Connection is an awakening, the opening of eyes that draws us into the present moment that we taste the goodness of our morning coffee, feel its warmth as it makes its way down into our body. It's the eyes-wide-open, filled-with-tears-of-joy when our little ones run and jump and play. It's the sharp reality of a broken bone, where you can feel even the air moving ten feet in every direction from your wound.

The Way of Jesus, the good news, is the Way of awakened connection to everything and everyone. It's forgiving debts. It's making whole.

People depart from "the Way" all the time, perhaps taking years to feel or see or understand anything. We are capable of catastrophic, horrible things in such disconnected states, and like Harper suggests, "thin" faith doesn't seem to measure up to some of the most heinous crimes we have committed.

Look for Godness in one another, seek connection. Feel your humanity. Open doors with dignity and humankindness. Seek God in every thing, and in no thing...see where—or who—Christ leads you to because wherever that is, whoever that is—is the next connection.