



NO MAN is an ISLAND

Recently I went out to lunch with a friend of mine, let's call her Phoebe. Phoebe is a fairly new friend, and while at lunch, she shared with me her late husband's illness and death at a fairly young age. As she dropped me off at my house, she apologized for laying all that stuff on me. She felt like she had been whining and complaining and monopolizing the conversation.

I didn't feel that way at all and said so. I'd heard bits and pieces of it before when we first met but not the whole story. What are friends for, but to listen to the whole story? We sat in her car for a while and talked more about it and she concluded with the thought that she didn't know why things happened the way they did, or for what reason (referring to her husband's death), but she believed that God always brings good out of bad. That was the hope she hung onto. I agreed with her. I believe that too.

I don't know about you, but I feel better about something difficult that I went through if I can look back and see a reason for why it happened, some good that came from it. Or if there was a lesson learned. OK, I get it. I needed that. I've had many of those instances in my own life.

What is really hard is when I don't see anything seemingly good that came out of a difficult situation. Of course, I'm usually looking for the good that came out of it for me, in my life. Because it's my story, right? We may never see what came out of a situation, or maybe not for a very long time. Or maybe not in our lifetime. We may be left hanging. I dislike that. I like things to be resolved. I like things to make sense.

Later that evening, thinking about the conversation Phoebe and I had, a thought occurred to me. What if, just maybe, sometimes we are a bit player, a side character in someone else's story? And that's the reason we can never make sense of it in this lifetime. What if we're not the central figure in what's happening every single instance in our lives? What if the benefit, or lesson is for someone else and not specifically for us? We are only needed in the story, to facilitate someone else's growth, or someone's "aha" moment. Which of course, doesn't mean we won't get our own lesson out of it, or benefit from it.

No man is an island, as English poet John Donne pointed out. We're all connected. It just doesn't seem like it, or feel like it sometimes, or even most of the time. We walk around, all of us with our edges and our boundaries, our individual lenses that we look at life through, our differing ways of thinking, of expressing ourselves and sometimes, vastly different experiences. The thought that we are all connected doesn't even seem possible with some people we run into in our lives. The idea that we're all connected is hard to wrap my head around as I live out my life at the center of my own little world. Where my body ends and yours begins seem to be two entirely different worlds most of the time.

Long before John Donne's time the Apostle Paul wrote In 1 Corinthians 12:13 , "*...But we have all been baptized into Christ's body by one Spirit, and we have all received the same Spirit.*" Then further down the chapter, in verse 26 it says, speaking of the body of Christ, "*If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.*" And in Colossians 2:19, it says "*...we are joined together in his body...*"

These words are not new to me but something is different for me. It is more than an abstract idea to me now that we are all part of one another and I'm wondering how I will, or can work that into my life.

I'm wondering what it will mean to me as I look at that person two rows over in church who I don't know very well, or who I don't know at all except for their name. Remembering that we are connected, whether it seems like it or not, will I find myself having tender thoughts about them? Will I listen to what they say with more interest, or more compassion? Will I take their welfare more seriously? Will I make an effort to seek someone out who I've never talked to before? Will I make more of an effort to "see" people beyond what I see superficially and that's good enough for me?

And what about the multitudes of people I have small transactions with daily? Or those who I pass by, but have no interaction with at all except that we are in the same place at the same time? What about my neighbors. People at the grocery store. Or Walmart. The gym. Co-workers. The homeless person with their dog. People driving on the same stretch of freeway as I am. At the doctor's office, as I wait. The gas station. What about that particular person who really rubs me the wrong way? Or gets on my nerves? Or who I can't see being connected to in any way - no way, no how.

Will the work Jesus has begun in me, in this heart of stone, make any difference to them? Will I think to myself, *hey, we're connected*, even though in a million years I would never think that we are? Will that realization change me? My thoughts? My actions? My heart?

I want to be like the pebble thrown in the pond. A very small stone, but with ever-widening ripples reaching further and further out from its center.

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