

For the Journey

May 8, 25. - Rev. Dave Crawford.



“Within all of us is a whole conglomerate of selves. There is the timid self, the courageous self, the business self, the parental self, the religious self, the literary self, the energetic self. And all of these selves are rugged individualists. No bargaining or compromise for them. Each one screams to protect his or her vested interests. If a decision is made to spend a relaxed evening listening to Chopin, the business self and the civic self rise up in protest at the loss of precious time. The energetic self paces back and forth impatient and frustrated, and the religious self reminds us of the lost opportunities for study or evangelistic contact.... No wonder we feel distracted and torn. No wonder we overcommit our schedules and live lives of frantic faithfulness. But when we experience life at the centre, all is changed. Our many selves come under the unifying control of the divine arbitrator. No longer are we forced to live by an inner majority rule which always leaves a disgruntled minority. The divine yes or no settles all minority reports. Everything becomes oriented in this new centre of reference. The quiet evening can be enjoyed to the fullest because our many selves have been stilled by the holy within. The business self, the religious self, the energetic self, all are at peace because they know we are living in obedience. There is no need to wave the flag of self-interest, since all things good and needful will be given their proper attention at the appropriate time. We enter a refreshing balance and equilibrium in life.”

- Richard Foster, [Freedom of Simplicity](#), 1981

I’m not sure I agree with everything Richard Foster asserts. He’s still with us by the way, 83 years old, a popular Christian theologian and author, particularly in the mid-80s through the 90s, raised in southern California in the Quaker tradition.

I guess I'm sceptical of our ability to manage the various competing selves he describes, even when we're enthusiastically dedicated to "life at the centre", but maybe that's the John Calvin in me, Calvin who believed that all our actions, even those which arise from the best of intentions, are still in some way egotistical, sometimes unconsciously egotistical. In other words, in Calvin's view, we're incapable of achieving "life at the centre" or at least incapable of maintaining it if or when we achieve it.

What I do agree with from Foster's words is the existence of separate aspects of our personalities, or selves I suppose, and the reality of "frantic faithfulness". What about you? For me my patient self sometimes competes with my energetic self. The pastoral self desires more prominence in the array of selves but sometimes gives way to the competitive self, especially during the NHL playoffs. My artistic self (however much of that there is) dreams of greater expression yet often comes face to face with the task-oriented self. You get the picture, but why not take a few moments right now and do your own personal inventory? What are the selves or elements of your personality, perhaps your spirit, that compete for space, expression, dominance in revealing to the world who you really are? And do we know what frantic faithfulness looks like, feels like?

This is all a bit "out there" in some ways. Nonetheless greater self-understanding surely is a good thing, beneficial to our personal growth as people and as Christians. So, taking the discussion a bit further, which sins are we especially prone to and are they connected to Foster's idea of selves? Is forgiveness a stumbling block and why? Are we drawn toward judging others? Why? Do we grapple with racism or bigotry, and again why? Such questions are surely the stuff of spirituality?

In any case, maybe pursuing a relationship with the Living God as we know Him in Jesus Christ is what life at the centre entails. It's not a goal to reach once and for all time but rather a continuous seeking of divine companionship, of inspiration toward the good, of obedience, of faithfulness, and sometimes we're like distant sojourners while at other times we're traveling companions walking the road to Emmaus.

*Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated unto you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, but always to your glory and the welfare of your people, through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
Amen. (William Temple)*