

Contemplative Outreach

Spiritual Journey with Thomas Keating

Part 5 Tape 24(b)



Wonders and Wisdom (1 Cor: 1.22-25)

Spiritual growth is letting go of the ego and being prepared to allow our traditional spiritual supports be challenged. In this passage, Paul points to the cross as our only support for faith. Using Jews and Greeks as a metaphor for contrasting approaches, he then questions those who look for signs and wonders, or for wisdom, as their faith support.

The Jews, he says, want signs, or miracles, or spiritual visions, or charismatic gifts etc as proof for their faith. However, these things are not needed for a mature and strong faith such as that of the Canaanite woman (Mt. 15:21ff) or the Roman Centurion (Mt. 8:5-13) whose own faith, in each case, wrought the miracle according to Jesus.

The Greeks, on the other hand, says Paul, look for wisdom, or enlightenment, or clarifying insight, or moral perfection.

For Jesus, nothing is secular. God is in all. God is existence (Aquinas). Faith, which we can usually read as “trust” makes signs unnecessary. God is a God of unconditional love and our relationship with such a God necessitates change from our relationship to a God who carried our projections. We need a more sophisticated relationship with a greater God than that we have envisaged.

In the parable of the yeast, yeast is a symbol of corruption (Mt. 13:33). Elsewhere, (cf Mt. 16: 5-12), we are advised by Jesus to avoid the yeast of the Pharisees, for example, so how is the kingdom of heaven like yeast? What Jesus appears to be saying is that even the nasty things in life, the storms, struggles and disasters can be a vehicle for the kingdom. The Pharisees put their faith in observance, feast days, sacrifice and the sacredness of the temple. Jesus’ alternative and truly revolutionary view is that God is in the everyday and its mess, just where we usually least expect him to be.

So, the crucified Christ that Paul preaches as an alternative to signs, wonders and wisdom is testimony to the same truth. God is in the unexpected and the unacceptable, as well as within us, and there is no need to go beyond our everyday circumstances to find him. When we are lost and confused and persecuted, God does not rescue us but he is there with us, just as Jesus maintains and as Jesus experiences on the cross.

