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Hold On ~ Run On ~ Keep on Keeping On

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.
1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV)

I may be wrong, but I feel like I am part of a generation of Christians that could use some encouragement. I see the struggles congregations are going through. I know about the struggles of ministers who feel exhaustion and burnout. It is because of these layers of struggle that I feel drawn toward words from Scripture that encourages encouragers.

My reading of the New Testament (if not the whole Bible) suggests that followers of Jesus (people of faith) are challenged to remain faithful (hold on/run on) while encouraging others to “keep on keeping on.” I’m left with some questions, though.

When did we western culture Christians drop the plurality of the community for the singularity of the person in this struggle? Why does the current culture of church seem to embrace individualism over the collective? When did exercise of power become political rather than spiritual? When did worship become a competition of preferences over a movement of adoration? When did the focus of concern become about who’s there rather than who’s not there? When did the goal of religious zeal become conformity rather than transformation and inclusion? When did the church self-impose separation from society rather than activate a movement of love, compassion, and justice? When did the church as “the body of Christ” become constricted to words of institution for the communal supper?

Could it be that organized church would benefit from becoming a movement that prioritizes relationships over structures? Could it be that those who preach and those who serve should be more invested in the mutuality in ministry than parsing the chancel? Could it be that fellowship should be about person-to-person engagement more than who’s bringing the stuff? Could it be that in current culture, becoming a believer is more of a process than a point in time? Could it be that a current test for church is to be relevant/relatable/restorative in a multi-cultural, multi-generational, post-Christian (ta ethne) world? Could it be time to promote the role of inquirer over curator? Could it be time to encourage the curious? Could it be time to practice “being with” over “just attending?”

We who still identify as practicing Christians are in need of encouragement. Encouragement often results from showing encouragement to others. Encouragement that does not reinforce the negatives and fading love for the way it used to be. Encouragement to try something new and fresh. Encouragement to renew both faith and practice. Encouragement to keep on keeping on following the Spirit of love God and love people. Encouragement that comes from letting go of what doesn’t work and embracing our imagination for what’s new and next. Years ago, in the year 2000 to be exact, I shared about an existential need that was and remains overwhelming – I describe it as “being desperate for a fresh encounter with God.” I truly believe that I am part of a world of others who feel this way too. Encouraged to be an encourager? Run on? YES!

Join with me in celebrating our heritage and our vision as “People of the Chalice.”
LOVE GOD! LOVE PEOPLE!

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