

On Life and Meaning

MARK PERES

Episode 29 – Tiffany Capers – Black Lives Matter

A Painted Canvas

And now a personal word,

There are ‘tells’ in every conversation, a word spoken or an unconscious action that reveals something true. I stay alert for those moments in this podcast when a guest shares a story or gestures in a certain way as they sit across from me, as they offer a note or a line that reveals something essential about them, a quality that I reflect on in these closing comments.

It is the best part of this project for me: being with my guests as truths are revealed and thinking deeply about who they are.

What was that moment with Tiffany? It was when she said that she paints but she wasn't sure she was an artist, that she has been working on the same painting for over two years, and being called an artist was for others to judge. That was it for me. It summed everything up as I imagine Tiffany coming back to that painting again and again, picking up the brush, layering, re-working, her vision evolving, staying with the task even as she is uncertain whether the painting is enough. Whether she is enough.

The painting of course is the work of social justice and advocacy. The work is endless, outcomes are uncertain, others may not think of well of you, and yet you enter the breach, again and again, compelled by a vision of a more beautiful world.

There is this quality to Tiffany that is the artist in full. Her advocacy is skilled and informed and referenced. There is text and subtext and context to what she does. There is pretext and post-text in her reading and writing and speaking and facilitating. She is in the world creating, bending the arc of the moral universe toward justice.

We see the public figure at work, her confidence and courage, and her talents impress. Yet to be with her privately is to see something in addition, and here is the part of her being an artist in full; she admits to self-doubt, she says she is uncertain about who she is and who she is yet to be, she yearns for greater meaning and satisfaction. And it is that very vulnerability that is her strength and reveals her as the artist of social change that she is.

Tiffany talks about making all the right choices – education, work, community, parenthood, trying to be good and do good – and still being seen and heard as a black woman in America with its blessings and burdens. That is her cross of contemplation and liberation. We each have our own crosses, some far more bearable than others, as we age, and think about the choices we've made, and who we are and who we want to be, in the bodies we inhabit, as time goes by.

There is so much work to do. So much that needs repair.

Tiffany talks about her daughter and the challenge and worries and hopes of bringing life into the world. Is she doing right by her child? Are we doing right by our children? Our children will let us know, as we let our parents know, as they let their parents know. It is an old story made new every night as we stare into the ceiling as the light dims.

Read her columns. Read the advocacy and prophetic voice. Read also the poetry. The rhythm of the sentences. The love that endures.

To meet Tiffany is to confront ourselves. All our complexity. All our contradictions. All our possibilities. That is the difference she is making.

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