

“What To Do - when there is nothing to be done.”

To Do? – or – To Be?

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You are a well-put-together person, say the psychiatrist, if you enjoy solving problems, you are healthy-minded, they say, if difficulties – if crisis challenge you to marshal your resources to do something about the situation. You’re A-OK if when you get bothered about something you get busy to settle it. I.e., if overcoming obstacles excites you to intell. purposeful action, action to achieve, action to accomplish goals, you likely are well on your way to becoming a true blue, all-American success. After all, to be an “activist” is most certainly the “in” thing. We Americans are activists + there’s good N.T. precedent for that. “Not everyone who sayeth to me, “Lord, Lord,” but he that doeth the will of my Father” and there is: “be ye doers of the word and not hearers only.” One of the key commands of the N.T. is not “sit” but “Go!” – “Get a move on!” Suppose the first 12 disciples had been nothing but a discussion group? They would have died sitting down. But no, Jesus did not meet with them just for “Sensitivity Sessions.” He kept saying to them in a 100 different ways: Not “sit” but “Move! Move along! Keep going!” There’s often the tone of the top Sargent in Jesus’ voice: “So! Do! Follow me! This way!” Thus, Christianity is not a “sit-around” religion. For to proclaim the gospel that Jesus is Lord and live like it, has, from the start, taken a lot of get up and go. Do-nothings have never made Saint. You can’t be a believer and just sit on your beliefs – not if you know the N.T. So, we’re doers – “movers + shakers,” activists by Christian profession of faith.

But there’s a dark side for the person who’s accustomed to “doing something” about everything, for those who are conditioned to action as the only answer to every crisis. For, tell me, what do you do when there is absolutely nothing to be done? Let us say you are willing, alright, willing to do, anything, at any cost, take any action, at whatever sacrifice – but... you are now in a situation in which you are helpless, powerless to do anything, anything effective. It’s out of your hands completely. You’ve already tried your best, done your blessedest, but the problem doesn’t go away. And, let’s say, you are not lying to yourself or anyone – you really have done all you can do and things are no better and give every indication they never will be. What then? “What now, my love?” Go to bed and pull the sheet over your head? Or what?

And oh yes, times like this do come in every person’s life. If not yet, then soon, sooner than we think. Up against the old solid wall, we’ll be “stymied”. For being at a “dead end” is a universal, a finally inescapable, human experience. It may be small comfort to belong to a fraternity that includes

everybody, but that's the way it is. Except for a few simpletons, of course, who keep hitting their thick skull against the wall hoping for a Jericho. It's natural, may-be, to hope against hope. Even St. Paul had trouble remembering some "Thorns in the flesh." Just don't go away, no matter how many times you pray and request a private miracle. God doesn't suffer such foolish requests gladly.

Meanwhile, back at the question: what do you do if you're an activist, when there is nothing to be done? Escape into some fiction? Weep? Take pills? Yell and scream? Get a hair piece? Turn sour and cynical or silly? What do you do when there's nothing to be done? When he or she goes away, and takes the children, and there'll never ever be another day, not like the old days of wine and roses? What do you do? Or when the youngsters grew up and go, and make their own decisions and choose their own lifestyles and beliefs and leave you behind, forever? What do you do? Or when someone you love turns criminal and steals or worse ... or ..., what do you do? Or after the accident when you're standing in that emergency room corridor, waiting, waiting, and they come and tell you ... what do you do? Or you look up through blurred vision someday from the stretcher and they're talking in whispers about someone not making it through and that someone is ... you. Well, tell me, what do you do, when all your life you've been trained to be a do-er, conditioned that way, and suddenly you discovered that, in all truth, you have reached a situation in which there is nothing you can possibly do?

Now, you listen to me + you listen carefully. These are the times we are lay bare as a person. No use pretending – not any more. Pretending is over. Pride won't do us any good now, not now. Have to lay the battered old pride + all its pathetic little status symbols aside. Panic won't help us either. That's devious. Neither will self-pity. So no pretense. No pride. No panic. No self-pity. Not now. Please. You see when you're stripped of all possibility for action, and you can't do anything, then its time ... for what? Time to ... be something. Not do something. But be something. There's a difference.

You see? We've ask the wrong question. When there's nothing to be done, you don't ask "what can I do now?" You ask instead "what can I be now?" You do see, don't you? For there is a lot you can be when you can't do anything. A lot of us get all riled up and frustrated and start yelping, "I've done all I know to do, God knows! What do you want me to do now? Just tell me and I'll do it!" When the truth is, the other person doesn't want us to do anything. They just want us to be something. Be What? Oh, I don't know exactly. At least... Be there. Be near. Be honest. Be mature. Be courageous. Be tender. Be warm. Be kind. Be open. Be trusting. Be caring. Be forgiving. Be accepting. Be human. Yes be human. For Christ's sake, truly for Christ's sake, to be and not just to do, especially now, when there is so little, or nothing, left, to do.

You understand me now? Don't you? When you be with someone, as fully as you can be, you actually only seem to be doing nothing. You are actually doing something. You are doing the most important thing of all, said St. Paul. For it's at the core of all doing that's worth doing. And you know what it's called, don't you? It's called ... you tell me. It's called "LOVE"

Let us pray

O our Lord, we confess it is often easier and more fun to do something than to be something. Besides, we've been trained that way. So teach us, O Lord, about the inner thing, things to go on when all else is gone. Teach us about the human light. Teach us about the light of faith, how to be still and know thou art God. Teach us about the light of hope, how to find new life when old doors are firmly closed. Above all, teach us about love, love that is real, in Jesus Christ, our Lord.