

Beginners mind

I have been fencing off and on for 8 months now. I also did a few month pre-Esme. It is a great workout and a ton of fun.

One of the many benefits of learning a new sport or activity as an adult is the opportunity to be a beginner again. I have to ask questions that are really basic because to me they aren't basic. I had learn everything from the start - even how to dress. I couldn't just assume. I had to ask. It is humbling and, well, freeing to be able to do something that I am expected to mess up. Freeing to know I will not be good at this, perhaps ever, or at least for a long time. The wisdom is that it takes 5 years to make a fencer. But while I mess up and ask questions I'm learning and exercising my body. I'm taken back to place where I'm just a beginner. I'm humble and free and loving it.

Fencing is called physical chess. It is a mind game and a body game.

Prayer is also a mind game and a body game. Praying can be like learning to fence.
what prayer is meant to do:

It changes how we think.

It changes how we see.

It makes us humble and free because it helps us see we need someone larger than us to make it through life. With fencing I need my coach. With prayer, it's God.

And with this humility we start looking at people with the eyes of Jesus.

It changes what we do which can be dangerous.

Danger can be good.

Unlike fencing we don't have the protective gear.

Through prayer we adopt the beginner's mind set from the Buddhist tradition.

Being like a little child from Jesus' teaching

Ask people to stand up.

Hands on your hips.

This is the stance of the stick people from the confirmation book See through the scriptures. This is the stance of people who are trapped in Sin. We are turned in ourselves. Our hands are on our hips and our view is affected. What can this person do for me? How will this affect me. Do I have enough time or energy or passion. Sin is I centered. It is about me!

But as we learned together in See Through the Scriptures the divine plan. God's plan. The Kingdom that Jesus is asking us to pray for is with our hands out! Holding our neighbors hands. Reaching for our neighbor. A gesture of being open and not of being closed off.

What changes in you when you hold your hands out instead of in?

You have a beginner's mind.
Or a mind like a child that is ready to learn.
Jesus tells us to have this kind of mind.
Reaching for our neighbor
Loving our neighbor

This kind of mind asks with arms outstretched:
What can I do for you?
Tell me about yourself?
I want to learn how to help.

Closed mind might think with arms in:
You have hurt me in the past.
Others have hurt me in the past.
I don't have time to learn what you need.
I'll give you what I think you need.

I don't think the beginner's mind means we can not learn from our experiences. It is rather a posture of openness and of continual acceptance. And yes, we will get hurt.

Moving down in the text we come to my favorite part mostly because it makes me chuckle:
Keep knocking because your friend isn't going to let you in just because you are a friend. You have to bug them enough to get out of bed.
We have to keep praying. Keep asking that our mind is changed. That we are opened up. That we see our neighbors as Jesus sees them. That our neighbors see us in this way.

The confirmation students had two years of talking about the original plan and looking through this lense of what we were created to be - people who serve God and neighbor. During which we looked at the Biblical story. We noticed when arms were in and when arms were out. We saw the sin as both individual and corporate. Sin as a system. And

sin within ourselves. Both types as a way of cutting off our neighbor and being concerned with just ourselves. It was near the end of these two years. I asked the confirmation families to start having conversations together about what is happening in the world and in Seattle. What issues are people dealing with? What problems do you see.

Then we gathered together. I had each of them report back on what their families discussed. Sounded like interesting conversations!

And then we asked the “dangerous” question. How can we open our arms to our neighbors? How can we tangibly help someone?

We pray. We ask God to pull our arms away from our body. As Jesus stretched his arms out, our arms are stretched out with his. He pulls us. It is through his power we can live with arms out.

Notice when Jesus tells us how to pray there is some very basic needs being addressed and very earthy ideas: Daily bread. Releasing others from debt. Temptation.

How can we open our arms to our neighbors? How can we tangibly help someone? This question is about how can we live with arms out is about following Jesus as our Servant King. When you live with this sort of boundless love the world doesn't always go “that's just super let me give you a trophy”. Instead that sort of radical love can lead and has led and led Jesus to death.

And so we pray for the Kingdom to come. We keep praying to become and stay a beginner with arms out and minds open.

Living with your arms out loving others doesn't guarantee an embrace. But we are called into this stance, by the one who lived it and died doing it. And through living it we are living out the Kingdom of God.

Back to the Confirmation students.

So what did that conversation lead to? Many of you know where I am going with this. That conversation led to what we will be doing next weekend: the building of the Tiny House.

I invite you to come into this project with the Confirmation students with a beginners mind. Be open to the Spirit working within you while you hammer nails and cut boards. I

have not used a skill saw in 15 years on a Habitat build. I'm a beginner. Come be a beginner with me. Pray for the Kingdom to come with tape measure in hand.

The Friday after the build is another opportunity. Visiting a Tiny House village. This will also require an arms out posture. A beginners mind to learn the stories of others.

We start with praying the way Jesus teaches us to. Praying for the Kingdom. Pray that your arms may be out.

We are praying for the Kingdom to come, so let's take a moment to talk about what that means.

The Kingdom of God is like a Tiny House built by a group of varied skilled volunteers. But let's not get too congratulatory. It is really just a tiny gesture toward a larger problem. This is part of the reason it is bringing the Kingdom. Soon Jesus will use the metaphor of the mustard seed to describe the Kingdom. Tiny little seed. The Kingdom of God is about the small moments. The Tiny house. The one person it will help.

And so through prayer we are called into this ministry alongside Jesus, into this Kingdom work as God works through us.

And so the Kingdom comes when we start with prayer and
Someone has a friend to listen to their troubles. One more person will have a door to lock at night. A family receives have a hot meal.

Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God with a beginners mind will never enter it. These are Jesus' words. This is what the beginner's mind is about. We come humbly like a child ready to learn. Praying for the Kingdom to come. That we may be part of it. That we may receive and be used.

With arms stretched out Jesus lived and loved. With arms stretched out Jesus died. With arms stretched out Jesus continues to love us and bring us into the Kingdom. May you feel his embrace as you go out into the world to embrace others.