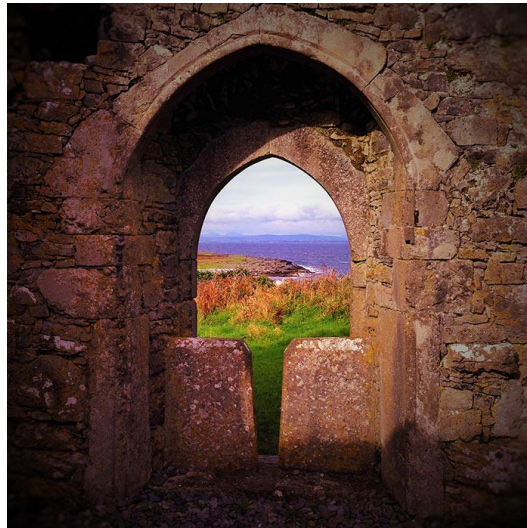




SIEBENQUELL

Sharing the Center of Life



SOURCE: ERIK RIECHERS

A short while ago, a woman said to me, »I want to make God the center of my life«. That sounds good, but I could not recommend that to her. Even though we often repeat this sentence, we need to raise a critical question the biblical stories: Would this be God's intention for us?

There are two great dangers when we try to form the center of life. The one danger is well known to us and we name it clearly: The human being makes himself or herself the center of life and displaces God. The consequences are well known to us and we feel them daily. Since we possess neither the wisdom nor the resource needed to fulfil God's tasks, we create calamity. Personally speaking, I do not believe, even when I wrestle with God, that the world would be in better shape if I was the one in charge. Age and experience no longer allow for that degree of arrogance.

The other danger is more insidious. Here we say »I will make God the center of my life«. This attitude is often seen as the corrective of the first danger, and therein lays the problem. This attitude is not a response to the Word of God and his biblical stories, but a reaction to the first attitude.

But this attitude is as dangerous as the first. In Mark 2, 1-12 the storyteller shows us the danger. »And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. 3 And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. 4 And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay« (Mk 2, 2-4) The people know that Jesus is in the house and they gather around it in order to listen to his words. Four friends carry a further friend to him, but the crowd does not make way and force them to climb on the roof. Mark is showing us a picture of what it looks like when God alone is the center of life. The consequence is, that humans are pushed away. No one has an eye for the paralysed man and his worried friends. The devastating consequences of this scene are known to us as well: humans are ignored when we are fixated on God alone. When only God counts and exclusively forms the center of life, the encounter with him blinds us for the true passions of his heart. And we, his people, are the greatest passion of his heart, the only one for which he was willing to die.

It was never the desire of God's heart to be the center of our lives, but to share the center of life with us. In the desert God wanted to live in the center of the camp, in a tent. That satisfied him utterly. God felt comfortable there, in the place where he could share the center of life with us. As David wanted to build God a temple, he gave a clear response: "Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges¹ of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, »Why have you not built me a house of cedar?« (2 Sam 7, 5-7).

Kings wanted to build God a house. They wanted to erect a temple high on a mountain. They wanted to place him alone at the center. God resisted mightily and without success. And right away the prophets were in business, because they constantly needed to raise the warning, that the God of the temple was always the God of everyday life. Sacrifices were offered, but God wanted justice, kindness, the willingness to serve, love, mercy and reconciliation. These things do not take place in the temple. They are grounded in the center of life and no place else. In John's Prologue we translate the text as: »And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us«. Literally the text reads: »The Word was made flesh and tented in our midst«. To this day, he wishes to pitch his tent in the midst of his people. God wants to share everything that belongs to our humanity, everything we live through and experience, everything we undergo and suffer through. That is and remains the core statement of the incarnation of Jesus.

Let us return to Mark 2. As soon as the friends remove the roof and lower their friend, Jesus shared the center of life with a wounded person. Immediately healing takes place: The paralysis is healed, a human being can move again and opportunities are opened where none existed before.

We have a God who is never satisfied until we share the center of life with him. We have built him temples and dedicated tabernacles to him. We have placed God on a pedestal, glorious, magnificent, but far from his beloved people. We speak of God words that are illustrious, but often so foreign to life. We are almost always willing to cede the center of life to God, but are rarely willing to give him what he really wants from us: the willingness to share the center of life with him.

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