

Today I want to tell you the story of Beth Brockman. Beth from Durham, NC. She's a mother of three. She is, by all accounts, your typical "mom-in-tennis-shoes - busy running the kids to soccer practice, making sure that her household responsibilities are taken care of, paying the bills. Her grandfather died last week, so life's a little bit serious at the moment, but generally the family are a pretty happy bunch. Her husband, Larry, shares in those tasks - so I guess this make him a "dad-in-tennis-shoes!"

Of course, Beth has a criminal record - a rap sheet that's...well, lets say it's got several items on it! Beth was in jail in 2005, again in 2008, again in 2010, again in....well, let's just stop there. You get the picture - right?

I suppose that might having this sort of criminal record might call into question whether she's really fit to be a parent. You know, spent time in jail - more than once; clearly unrepentant.

Her descriptions of what being jailed is like are quite chilling - our penal system is not about rehabilitation, its about retribution. She talks about begin strip-searched for "contraband," begin given skimpy jail overalls that were always inadequate given the cold and drafty nature of most American jails. No privacy. Inadequate or non-existent medical care. Heartless, cruel jailers. And the list goes on.

Some might say "just desserts."

Larry has stuck by her through thick and thin.

So why is Beth's story so important? It has to do with a woman named Dorothy Day, who in 1933 , along with Peter Maurin, founded the Catholic Worker movement. The movement's aim has always been to "live in accordance with the justice and charity of Jesus Christ." One of the movement's guiding principles is hospitality towards those on the margin of society. The Catholic Worker movement is all about social justice, especially for the least and the lost in our midst.

But Beth is not a recipient of their largesse, not a beneficiary of their action, except in one way. So why am I telling you about Beth Brockman and the Catholic Worker Movement?

Those are good questions, because this is not a Lenten story about redemption. Or, at least, not a story about redemption where Beth is concerned. It's also not a story about what a great Christian Larry is for sticking by Beth, now how wonderful the CWM is for helping her (though it is a wonderful organization!). **It's about the Scandal of cross** - To take up your cross was, for the early Christians, a scandal - much worse than lots of jail time - not just embarrassing, or shameful, but scandalous! So who's Beth? Who's Beth in this context? A person willing to endure the scandal of prison for what she believes.

Beth is an active member of 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian Church in Durham, NC. She is a faithful, active, engaged follower of Jesus Christ. She is a person of integrity and action. Back in the spring of 2005 Beth attended a Catholic Worker retreat in Chatham County, NC. As a consequence, she

began to pray and meditate about ways in which she could become involved personally and actively in seeking to confront those profound societal issues that face all of us: what about immigration? What about the murky involvement of politicians of every stripe in decision-making that places thousands – no, hundreds of thousands – of Americans in harms' way? What about the way our legal system is stacked against the poor, or how large corporations seem to be able to write their own laws, or how the fight for civil rights never really ended and we're just beginning to notice?

What does a good Christian do? The short answer is given by Jesus himself: ***"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."***

There are lots of things good Christians can do, and they won't be the same things. Some of us agree with some of the things I just described, but not others.

In the end, though, and irrespective of the truth that sometimes we'll have to agree to disagree, the core of our faith calls us to ***do something***; something more than simply wringing our hands and wishing things were different. Our faith calls us to embrace those issues where we can see injustice bearing its blood-stained, naked claw, and ***do something***. Sometimes we have to stand up and be counted; sometimes we have to speak out; sometimes we have to march.

Sometimes there are consequences. The consequences for Beth Brockman have been that she's seen the inside of quite a few jails – seen the ugly underbelly of the Justice system. It is, for her, the cost of discipleship. ***"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."***

Sometimes that cost is extreme. Jonathan Myrick Daniels was an Episcopal seminarian from the Diocese of New Hampshire who was one of the Freedom Riders during the Civil Rights era. On August 20, 1965, Daniels intentionally stepped in front of a seventeen-year-old black woman named Ruby Sales and took the shotgun blast fired by a white deputy intended for Ruby. He was killed instantly. ***"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."***

I said "extreme." Fortunately (and I mean that, "fortunately") few are called to that sort of self-sacrifice.

But we are called to some sort of self-sacrifice. For us as Christians, that self-sacrifice is – according to Jesus, anyway! – always motivated by love, and especially the middle one of the three that Jesus mentions: of God, of neighbor, of self.

Our ability to live a sacrificial life as Christians understand it is predicated on an outward-facing orientation to the world and to each other. As Ernest Hemingway said, ***"When you love you wish to do things for. You wish to sacrifice for. You wish to serve."*** And Balzac observed that ***"...there is far more happiness in another's happiness than in your own."***

Last week I left you with three questions, the middle one is central. If Lent is about the Greek's

question: “Sir, we want to meet Jesus” then “What are you willing to do to open yourself to the presence of God during this Lent?” This week my invitation to you is to wonder in what ways you can live a sacrificial life as a Christian?” What is God calling you to do, or to become, so that when Easter comes – as it will, objectively, no matter what you do – so that when Easter comes, it will come for you in a new and unique and wonderful way!

