

A seeker comes before God in the privacy of prayer.

“God, I have been feeling stained, incompetent, hypocritical, worth nothing, exposed, and very brittle, I seem to have been making one mistake after another, revealing to others the inadequacy and fearfulness that have shaped my whole life. Why have these feelings remained so vivid after so many years?”

“You don’t listen. Much of the strain you experience is the strain required to avoid listening.”

“I’m afraid to listen to you. That’s true. You have no mercy. You go right to the heart, straight through to the center. You’re not polite. I don’t know how to act around you. And I’m afraid of you. Yes, there it is. In my mind I am drawn to you – I want to turn to you. But in my deepest self there is wariness: You’re going to do something to me.”

“What?”

“Take away my life. You’ll strip me of everything I have and make me truly vulnerable. Now I feel vulnerable, but then I’ll *be* vulnerable – naked in a savage world. I think you would do that because you’re unpredictable, at least by human standards. You’re dangerous.”

“Why do you think I want to harm you?”

“Because you demand that we love one another as you love us, and that means loving us to death. To obey your call to love is to put myself in a place where dying becomes possible. Why do you do that? Why do you ask us to live like that in a world with so many jagged edges?” Look, I can’t think of a worse feeling than the feeling of being vulnerable. Why do you ask that of me?”

“Have I asked that of you?”

“Well, not precisely. I mean, not directly...yet. But you would if I gave you the chance. I know you would. That’s what you do.”

“But how do you know what I’ll do?”

“Well, I don’t know for sure, but that’s just as bad. Either you will call me to die or you’ll do something that I can’t predict. How can I listen to you when I’m so skittish?”

“Just listen and don’t presuppose so much. You nurse so many assumptions. You try to visualize the future; you try to suppress the past; you try to anticipate everything. Just listen.”

“But why should I trust you? You don’t protect your friends. It seems dangerous even to be around you. Something’s always stirred up where you are. There’s no rest. Nothing is settled. I need rest, security, protection, clarity.”

“I know you do.”

“You do?”

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