

RUSSELL'S RUMINATIONS
A LETTER OF ANALYSIS AND COMMENTS ON ISSUES
OF INTEREST TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Vol. 6, No. 2
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Cobden, Il. 62920
August, 1985

Dear Friends:

Since I sent off the first Ruminations for this year of 1985 in ~~April~~, May (?), or June, perhaps, I haven't given much thought to this present one, because it is to be about the stories I wasn't able to include in No. 1. There wasn't much comment from readers on that one, but as I reread it I like it, and I just assume some of you did, too. I have found more reinforcement during this year (than ever before) for the assertion that the story is a very important way to express truth. I had a summer Workshop that focused on "Human/Spiritual Interaction: a Wellspring of Positive, Holistic Health", wherein there was an assignment/opportunity to write two stories and two letters. Those taking the course were generally marvelous people, and so I have a new collection of truth and observation in story and letter form.

And so I set forth on this "combined" task... of writing a letter about stories. But first... the acknowledgement: I unabashedly aver that the Teachings I offer herein (in whole and in part) are from meditations that I have several times a week (usually the first waking hour of the day) in which I write down, as faithfully as possible, what a Source identified as the Holy Spirit offers to me. The first one was on May 20, 1979 entitled, "Read the Messages", and the latest was this morning, August 23, 1985, entitled "An Update on Fun and Humor." (This latest offers some last minute help with a sermon I'm to offer to the Presbyterians in Marion, IL this Sunday, an affirmative answer to the question, "Does God Have a Sense of Humor?") So I have this rich resource of observations on life and conditions in this time by a Spirit Who has "been from the beginning" and has lots of practice in observing. These Teachings, then, are the basis for my Ruminations, and all of it is this letter.

I'll repeat part of the introduction to the April letter... to the effect that the stories I shall talk about are from the Bible. For some readers this is "good news"... for others it can be bothersome... or more. I just urge you to appreciate each story, whether you "know it's true" or "doubt its origin"... or have some intermediate judgment. Look for truth, somewhere here within.

Let's start with a really old story, familiar in some ways to nearly every one. I'll call it, as the Spirit did in His Teaching, "Adam and Ever and the Garden." The story is really rather long, as I consider including it in a 9 ½ page letter, so I have left out portions not important to the Spirit's expressed interest.

... Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the East; and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the

day that you eat of it you shall die.” Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him”... so the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man... and the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed...

Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?’” and the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” and he said, “I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.” He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent beguiled me, and I ate”... and the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them. Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil, and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever - - - Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. (Gen. 2:7, 15-18, 21-23, 3:1-13, 21-23)

The opening paragraph of the Teaching tells, obliquely, that this is in reference to a sermon preached at Central Union Church in Honolulu in August of 1982... and that the benediction did ask, as these often do, for the wisdom and help of the Holy Spirit through the coming week. I “discerned” His message the next day.

This Adam and Eve story usually is interpreted in a fairly straight, literal way... God wanted them to be obedient... they weren't... so he kicked them out. Here is another interpretation of a story of relationship.

AUG. 9, 1982
MON., 6:15 AM

ADAM AND EVE AND THE GARDEN

PAUL'S ROOM
HONOLULU

1. The sermon yesterday morning in that well-remembered sanctuary was on this theme, so your attention has been centered on this first earthly story. So hear some more meaning, o son, that you might have a better understanding of My working in the world. The benediction asked that I be present in the lives of all those there. But you may be the only

one listening in this direct a way, as I am in the lives of those who want Me and who have the spiritual maturity to discern Me and accept Me.

2. The story of Adam and Eve in the Garden is a true spiritual story. Don't bother yourself with details about where, when, or were there other people already "outside". Accept the story as one of relationship between Me and thee, for that is essentially what the Holy Bible is (as Lex Miller told you years ago). Remember also My premise that because one story of a relationship is true all other stories, told differently, of the same circumstances are not untrue. Unscrambled and more directly said, this means that other ways of telling the story may also be true. Let Me try one on you.

3. I created the earth as a realm of being that would test spiritual development and encourage spiritual growth in a special way. As it is first portrayed the Garden was not different enough from other realms. The man and the woman had earth forms, but they still were essentially obedient spirits. They gave no attention to their bodies. They lived as spirits in complete obedience to Me, without any thoughtful alternative.

4. There is a merit to this life relationship, but I have other realms in which this is the mode. The earth was to be different. (I have told you a bit about devas; some of them have never incarnated in the earth, and they serve Me mightily and fully, without rebellion or protest. I just do not want all spirits to be of this nature.) From the earth could come spirits who have rejected Me, tried other ways of living, and then come back to Me with a maturity built by experience.

5. The human family analogy is an apt one. Some children grow up, constantly and consistently obedient to their parents, doing only what their parents desire. In extreme cases they never marry or even desire an independent life of their own. They assume the parent's values and lifestyle without question and when the parents die they still show no rebellion or relief. They simply finish out their lives in obedience and conformity. While that style has some attraction, particularly as you think of John Patrick, Peter, and Matthew, you feel that it is "too perfect". So did I.

6. Adam and Eve were just too naïve and obedient. So enter the serpent. From whence did he/she come? Is there a story of another creator? No, I'm afraid not. I created the serpent to do what can now be seen as a "dirty job"... he had to "get the good kids out of the house". You must also know that I was not naïve about the single prohibition I set up and emphasized. Yet initially Adam and Eve didn't even consider going against the prohibition. Something had to spur their deviance. But it wouldn't have been as good if I would have told them to go against Me.

7. So the serpent was persuasive (would it have been a better story if she/he had been rebuffed?) and sin commenced... motives and actions apart from Me and My Will. (But what was My will in this situation?) I could have been forgiving, but I was not. In fact, I was harsh beyond reason. Why? Because the earth had to become what it was intended to be. The "forbidden fruit" gave the desire to be one with Me... but with some knowledge of alternatives. The law of karma was established as the first law... as you sow, so shall you reap. Grace finally came to mediate and moderate that. I shall continue the story another day. Think on these words this day.

Paragraph #2 offers the essential perspective for this story and for many others in the Bible - - if one story or interpretation is true, this does not mean that other stories or other interpretations of the same story are false. Truth comes in different forms, all of which are not consistent. The Gospel of John is quite different from the three other, Synoptic gospels, but most Christians don't try to decide which is true. (Though some have, rejecting one or the other as "not genuine").

Now #3 offers a perspective that has come over and over again in My Teachings... the earth is a unique and special realm for the testing of spirit and the growth and development of this eternal aspect of the human person. And, at first, the Garden just didn't have this quality. The man and woman were "obedient spirits"... and they didn't even consider being otherwise. (I have often wondered how long this dutiful obedience lasted... how long the "pre-serpent" time was... have you?)

Then #4 offers the turn in the story - - the earth was not to be a realm of unquestioned obedience, but one that encouraged growth through rejection, moving away to independence, and then voluntary returning. (Sounds like the Prodigal Son, in macrocosm, doesn't it?) I was not a rebellious youth, in any real sense... given the "achievements" of the next generation. Yet, in high school, I wanted to play football, and I wanted to join Comus Club (an illegal fraternity), and my Mother said No. I was not obedient to these wishes, and I persisted until I got what I wanted... and these were the two major remembrances of my high school days. I did what authority did not want... and it was good.

Then comes #5 with the human family analogy. The Spirit sketches the perfect picture of children that are absolutely obedient... and who never oppose their parents' will and never seek to do anything other than what parents proclaim... and genuinely want no other way. It does sound marvelous, doesn't it? Or does it? Is obedience, without any challenging thoughts or desire, really the ideal? I am proud of what our sons have accomplished, even as it is different from how I would have programmed them, if they would have done my will completely. And how would I have felt if I had the full responsibility of determining the course of their lives? Hmhmhmhm.

The paragraph #'d 6 continues the "counter story" - - "Adam and Eve were just too naïve and obedient"... the "good kids" just had to be gotten out of the holy garden. The story gets rather bizarre at this point... a talking snake who knew a good deal about God and the garden (more than they did, certainly), and who persuaded Eve to go against the one prohibition. The details are not important, of course. God wanted us, humankind, to have a sense of the knowledge of good and evil, so that we might grow in spirit and return to Him, willingly and with the knowledge of alternatives.

As #7 indicates, God was not forgiving (and the Christian faith holds that this is a vital part of His nature), and He was harsh beyond reason. Why? The Spirit says, "Because the earth (and its people) had to become what it was intended to be." And what was that? A realm that gives lots of alternatives, including that of ignoring, or even rejecting, God. A realm that has justice ("our" word for karma) in many, many mixtures with forgiveness ("our" word is grace).

At the end is the promise that this would be continued another day. It was, later that year, and then again in mid-1984. One of these closed with these thoughts:

In human form a spirit must cope with cause and effect. But the value which Adam and Eve received from the forbidden fruit, which I had made known to them, was the knowledge of good and evil, which was not necessary in the Garden, but which is for life outside. When you have flashes of the true feeling that good and evil aren't necessary concepts you are flashing on the return to the Garden, which is spiritual maturity,

regained. Grace is your ticket back to the Garden, and the consequence is no good and evil, but just God. But as long as you are outside, the knowledge is useful, even necessary.

Whenever you do, whatever you do, for Me, you are moving back into the Garden. It is a wonderful “place”, but you have to be truly ready for it. It doesn’t come without effort, but, still, you can’t make it with hard work. You will go in and out for awhile... until you are ready. (“Adam and Eve, Continued,” Sept. 13, 1982)

That’s a better way to close the discussion than anything I could muster. So... Selah.

* * * * *

Another story upon which the Spirit has commented is that of Moses and the burning bush. I won’t reproduce the story, which is in Exodus 3:1-12, but it tells of Moses, herding sheep for his father-in-law, being attracted by a bush that “was burning, yet it was not consumed.” It was the Lord’s way of attracting his attention so that He could give him a job to do... just the little one of leading the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. Moses was reluctant, of course, and questioned God’s judgment. But God says, simply: “I will be with you.” And with that help Moses did the job, but displeased God in the long process. God compromised... letting him see the land “flowering with milk and honey”, but not letting him enter.

Early this year I had a Teaching entitled, “The Burning Bush”, which likened this call of mine to receive these Teachings with this call to Moses. The third paragraph said:

Yes, o son, the bush that burns and is not consumed in the burning symbolizes the fact that My energy is constant and ever-renewed. You are now into your sixth year of writing, and new titles and themes continue to be offered to you. There is repetition and reinforcement to be sure that you learn and relearn certain fundamentals, but there is no end to the encouragement I have for you as a servant of Mine. You are doing reasonably well in bringing the spiritual dimension into reality for your health education field, but you still have much more to do. I shall continue to supply you with these basic thoughts; your bush shall certainly continue to flame without diminution. (“The Burning Bush”, January 5, 1985)

It says, again, that my call is to learn and relearn fundamentals and then to help bring the spiritual dimension into acceptance as a legitimate health concern. I have done several guest presentations on this theme over the last six years, but this summer (as I mentioned previously) I did the first full 3 semester credit course... as a 3 week, concentrated workshop... Here at S.I.U.-C., and, with the Lord’s promised help, it was a great success... and I have applied to do it again next summer. During the third week I did share with the group my “spiritual story”, which includes this call... and I read them one Teaching. This was risky, but I was willing. “The Burning Bush” continues...

The burning bush and your Teachings do share a common difficulty. Rationally these are not expected happenings, and they are not in the experience of most others. Therefore many people, when they hear of such “unnatural happenings”, will not expand their sense of reality and, instead, diminish their perception of your credibility. Can you imagine the reaction of most people when Moses told of seeing a bush that burned without being consumed and hearing God calling him personally to a major leadership position! The story is reasonable now because Moses’ earth life is long past, and his leadership was

memorable and fundamental. Such success deserves a miraculous beginning. Your acceptance is quite good, given your performance. Fortunately there are still a good many folks, even in your rational/scientific culture, who can accept, or tolerate, a few miraculous, non-explainable happenings. (“The Burning Bush”, January 5, 1985)

The perspective is a fascinating one. Because Moses’ earth life is “way back”, and he did accomplish the task God called him to... in a very dramatic way... a miraculous commencement seems appropriate. But the reaction of most people to Moses, the sheep-herder, when he told of a burning bush and God talking to him directly, must have been pretty varied... with a lot of disbelief. (“Come on, Mo... a bush that just kept burning?!”) Many people will not or cannot expand their working concept of reality to include such an unnatural happening as My Teachings; the rational alternative is to lessen their perception of my integrity, intelligence, and credibility... and move me toward the weirdo category. However, as the paragraph suggests, I am finding an increasing number of people in my professional field who are interested in these Ruminations... and seem to have come to some terms with this meditation that I do. That is wonderfully satisfying. Here is the remainder of the Teaching...

The burning bush was (and is) a marvelous, unlikely occurrence. It gets attention. And that is its major purpose. Then comes the task, and My servant Moses found the one I had for him a terribly frustrating one, at times, even as it was very satisfying at others. Remember that when I call you, it is not for purple robes, goblets of wine, and heavenly leisure, but for some task, great to small... that you might not have volunteered for, if free will were truly free.

So, am I still burning bushes? Yes, indeed. I am as actively involved in the world today as when I confronted Moses. Oh, there is a greater variety of dangers to physical life, but there also are more creatures (particularly human) abounding now... and you are in a culture that is good at both creating and identifying problems. Therefore it is harder for you to hold to the simple truth that the life of the spirit is the only one that continues, so a few more years of human earth life may be of no ultimate significance.

Moses came to Me by way of the burning bush, and, sometimes with reluctance, he completed the task I set for him (with My powerful help, of course). Yet I would not have him enter the promised land. He had to die outside, which was clearly My will. Accepting a call from Me guarantees you no plush reward nor earthly acclaim. But it is a means of spiritual growth, and this is what is important. Moses grew more spiritually from losing this final triumph than he would by being a recognized hero. You, too, have no guarantee other than that you may grow in My service more than outside of it. Humbleness no ka oe. (“The Burning Bush”, 1/5/85)

So it reminds us again that the Lord can seek our attention, and may well intrude upon our “free will.” (This free will is a concept that Western Protestant Christians like, but the Scriptures teach little directly about it. It’s interesting to consider, for example, that in the Adam and Eve story God skewed the circumstances so that they did what they wouldn’t ordinarily do... even as we usually consider this “sinful.” My present understanding is that I have “free will”, but so does the Holy Spirit, and when there’s a “contest” he is most often the victor.) It says here that He is still “burning bushes”, and the tasks may be some that do not result in “plush reward or earthly acclaim”.

Spiritual growth is the ultimate value, not length of life, comfort, or acclaim. And it is never certain when and under what circumstances this growth will take place. The last sentence is a powerful bit of

advice, in obscure form. The “no ka oe” (or is it “oi”?) is a Hawaiian expression meaning “is the best” or “can’t be surpassed”... a strong recommendation for humbleness in relation to any apparent chosenness or other spiritual assuredness.

* * * * *

The next story also deals with being chosen, adding the controversial “opposite” of being not chosen... even rejected. The story, as it is recorded by Matthew goes...

Then the Kingdom of Heaven shall be compared to ten maidens who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, “Behold, the Bridegroom! Come out to meet him.” Then all those maidens rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.” But the wise replied, “Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.” And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast; and the door was shut. Afterward the other maidens came also, saying, “Lord, Lord, open to us.” But He replied, “Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.” Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. (Matthew 25: 1-13)

The Teaching came while I was on a convention trip to California. I was staying with my brother-in-law, Larry, and I had worshipped in an Episcopal church he day before, where the sermon was preached on this story/theme. I leave out only the first, salutary paragraph.

... 2. The major point of the story is a good one, and I recommend it to those who are outside My fold... even on another path. Be ready and available when My call comes, for I have need of thee... You must be always ready for opportunities that are ultimately service to Me, even as they appear to be less dramatic.

3. When you have accepted My hand, however, it is NOT a call to come or be excluded, except by an enormous act of will on your part. I will never close the door and say you shall not enter. In this sense, I am countering My story, told as Jesus.

4. Is it wise to be prepared, and foolish to be unprepared? Of course. When you are one that is prepared, is it wise not to help others who are not prepared and yet who want to come to Me? It may be wise, but hence I call upon you to do the foolish thing... listen to your spirit, which is tuned to Mine, and share, showing love and concern for others rather than intelligent concentration on your own well being. You see, it is a story of “wisdom” (though not in a true spiritual sense), which then leads to the admonition to be foolish rather than wise. It is a formula for being first, which must be countered by “the first shall be last, and the last, the unprepared and therefore the unwise, first.”

5. It is a story which teaches a bit directly, and a lot more indirectly or obliquely. I am not averse to such teaching. And let Me offer another strange lesson from the story. You needn’t have your lamp lit all the time, wasting oil... which translates to - - you needn’t be acting as a visible evangel all of the time, but can be a “regular professional”, serving in non-spiritual ways (even as everything you do is, finally, spirit manifested). BUT you must

be ready to light and trim your lamp when the time is right. In the midst of this secular convention you shall have opportunities to “light your lamp and show the way.” Await these, but in the meantime function as a good professional.

6. You see, Scripture can conflict with Scripture. It was not wise for the father to prepare a calf for the return of his prodigal son. He should have shut the door and left the son to moulder in his unwise, foolish wasting of substance and life. Instead he welcomed the prodigal back, just as you shall welcome Matthew back, and he shall finally come. It often is not wise to share, but I say, SHARE. Give of yourself as I gave of Myself.

7. It would have been wise for Me to speak in proper terms to Pilate, explaining the nature of My Kingdom and bringing him to a quiet acceptance of Me, rather than a sentencing to death. Shouldn't I look out for myself? Instead I did the foolish thing, which brought suffering and death... which brought resurrection, grace, and salvation. Consider that some of the foolish young women in the story found ways to help others as they went in search of oil. Even as they did unto the least of these, turning away (or so it seemed) from their direct path back to Me, they did it unto Me, and lo, they are within, even in their foolishness.

8. Be prepared. That is the message. Yet you can function in other ways also, mixing your wisdom and your foolishness, even as I do, even on this day. Be My Servant.

So let it be.

7:09 AM

The overall point to the story, offered immediately, is that everyone should be ready for a “call”, whether you expect such or not... whether it is to some obvious task or just some service to a needy fellow human. And then the Teaching (in #3) counters the story, saying that exclusion is not the Lord's style. The story says that the Kingdom of heaven is one from which people are excluded because they are foolishly unprepared. The Teaching (in #4) doesn't fault the notion of being prepared, but does favor the foolishness of helping others out of that preparedness, rather than just accepting the benefits it deservedly brings.

Your spirit, attuned to the Holy Spirit, may often call on you to take the foolish, other-centered action rather than take the wise, careful route to the head of the line. There is no guarantee that acting in such foolish ways will be to your advantage, but there is the message that foolishness is often the Lord's way, particularly when it is a genuine concern for others rather than for self.

Paragraph #5 offers me another lesson... applicable, perhaps, to some of you who also are “non-clergy” professionals... don't waste your oil trying too hard to be, as He puts it, “a visible evangel.” I realize that this seems to go against certain other lessons, but truth doesn't have to be consistent. (Have you consistently heard this?) If I do my professional work well, from this will come opportunities for spiritual service that would not have been possible if my spiritual lamp had been brightly aflame. I'm comfortable with this.

Then comes (in #6) the verification of one conflict. If the principle in this story had been applied to that of the prodigal son (remember Ruminations, April, 1985?) the story would have been different. The father was commendably foolish. The explanation goes on (#7), telling of the foolishness of Jesus' sacrifice, which guaranteed salvation and grace. There's more than one way to “get inside” or to reach final “at-oneness”. (The Hindus acknowledge this more directly with their variety of yogas.) Some who

turn away from the apparent direct path may be accepted for what they do, among those others that God loves. The best life is certainly some rhythm of wisdom and foolishness.

* * * * *

I close with the story of Jesus in interaction with a woman who clearly was “outside” and with Pharisees who seemed certainly “inside.”

The Scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to Him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?” This they said to test Him, that they might have some charge to bring against Him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask Him, He stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” And once more He bent down and wrote with His finger on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before Him. Jesus looked up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again. (John 8: 3-11)

**JUNE 13, 1982
SUN., 5:02 AM**

THE WOMAN...

**FARM
STUDY**

- 1. From time to time you think, o son, of the controversial nature of this that We do together and of the content of some of the teachings. Hear this morning as I tell you of one of My controversies, the story of the woman caught in adultery.**
- 2. It actually happened, but, as you know, it is just barely in the Bible. There was controversy over its authenticity, but it was not unique in this regard. Some stories and sayings that are less authentic are easily included because “I would say and do that.” But, predictably, there were moralists who honestly felt the danger of including such a story of Me, as Jesus, considering sin and goodness. Most “authorized” versions of the Holy Bible include it in small print, indicating that the controversy is in the authenticity. Not so.**
- 3. Many Christians are downright uncomfortable with the term “yin and yang”. In older terminology this is “pagan”, and is certainly Eastern, which means religious traditions that Christianity must supplant. I have taught you before that the greatest example of yin and yang, the opposite forces that must co-exist and eternally balance one another even as they oppose, is justice and mercy. This story is about justice and mercy, but it is also about sin and righteousness, which is the basis for its controversy. You see, good Christians like to feel that righteousness should prevail over sin, not that they are both necessary forces that balance each other. And the story strongly suggests that this is so... these are yin and yang type “forces”.**
- 4. “Though shalt not commit adultery” is a commandment, instituted as protection for the family (just as “though shalt not kill” constitutes protection for earthly life). The sex act is the act of procreation, and procreation resulted in lineage. In Biblical times if a man’s wife had a child, he wanted to be certain it was his child, for it would bear his name and be ever**

after known as part of his lineage. If a woman was adulterous she was either running the risk of carrying another man's child and having it become (falsely) part of her husband's heritage or (if she was unmarried) she was ruining her chances of becoming the wife of a good man and bearing his children in proper lineage fashion. The family is a wonderful institution, and it needs protection, but, of course, it never has worked perfectly. (Technically, Mary committed adultery in order that I, as Jesus, might be of the lineage of David... and if I, the Holy Spirit, were the procreator and am also at one with the son... you see that it gets a bit muddy.)

5. Back to The Woman. She was caught in adultery. She had committed overt sin. Justice should prevail. She should be stoned to death (which could be fast and merciful or slow and painful) by the men who were righteous. Righteousness should clearly triumph over sin... to show, dramatically, that righteousness is superior, not just a balancing force. I was asked for a judgment. I said, softly and non-forcefully, "He who is without sin, let him throw the first stone." I said, in effect, that there are other sins, and those who uphold righteousness have also sinned. I also showed mercy and forgave the woman, making her righteous. Then if justice had been carried out the righteous men would have killed a righteous woman, making them sinners in their carrying out of justice.

6. Some Christians, in any age, would have liked it better if I would have said, loudly and forcefully, "She has committed adultery and therefore has broken the commandment of highest magnitude. Oh, righteous men, stone her to death that sin may not prevail."

7. Well, I prefer the rhythm of yin and yang, of justice and mercy. I did not always do what was expected of Me... and this still is so. Know Me as I am, not as some would have Me be. "Though shalt have no other gods before Me", even more righteous ones?!

Shalom on a Sunday

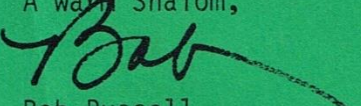
6:21 AM

I knew there would be little space for any sizeable comment on this Teaching, packed with potential controversy. It is one of my favorites, and it, of course, calls for balance, even of sin and righteousness (which God clearly wanted, even from Adam and Eve and the Garden). This doesn't mean, of course, that the balance needs to be equal, for righteousness should be more prominent than sin... as peace should prevail more than war, and love more than hate. I still bet there was a little Jewish man in that group who was reaching for a rock, reassuring himself, "Vell, I never did anything like that!"

The last paragraph is another reminder (I've had many) that we must resist the temptation to make the One True God more righteous than He is and wants to be. After all, it is a Commandment.

And so I have completed an enjoyable task... one that is almost a regular, "scheduled" part of my life. If anyone has a suggestion for a future letter, I'm certainly open... and I can almost speak thusly for the Spirit.

May all your burning bushes be symbols, and may you encounter no stones as you write on the ground in your garden. And do enjoy the rest of summer.

A warm Shalom,

Bob Russell
Christian, Professor, Health Educator
Writer, Songsinger, Farmer,
Philosopher, Storyteller