



We Are All Beggars, by Chaz Howard

A lived theology of the bottom does not see the world through good and evil lenses. Â This is not a denial of the existence of evil, rather it is believing that evil is something that is done by people.Â People are not bad, they just sometimes do bad things. Â And all bad things have a source â€“ soil from which they emerge. Â

As a seminarian, I met a young poet named Anne Marie who once penned in a poetic letter she shared with me; â€œFear is the garden of sin.â€• Â Over time to that Iâ€™ve come to add â€œhurtâ€• as well, for the wounded heart is often a source for great compassion or great violence.

Knowledge that those around us who are doing wrong, do so for a reason, should allow us to see and appreciate their humanity and their potential to be redeemed.

Itâ€™s radical to believe in the potential for redemption. Â A person who robs stores and/or deals drugs is not an evil person. Â Perhaps it was life circumstances, mental health, fear, a lack of options, a lack of education that led them to this point in their lives. Â Hopelessness, desperation and the feeling of being dehumanized can take an individual to depths that they did not know they possessed. Â

The humility and strength of character that one must feel in order to bring themselves to pan handle or beg for money or for food is something deeply foreign to most of us. Â If it were not hard enough to have to extend oneâ€™s hand and beg for scraps, the experience of being ignored by people who have the means to change your life is heartbreaking. Â And those who stop often give you only a few coins, never touching your hand, never looking you in the eyes, never asking your name. Â Over time for some this is just too much. Â Oneâ€™s voice getâ€™s louder. Â They throw away politeness and no longer care about how they look. Â And the hurt of dehumanization and the fear of starving, soon bears a bitter fruit.

Ahhh, now that the beggar is â€œloud and aggressiveâ€• we at last see him or her â€“ only long enough to remove them from the previously peaceful space.

A theology of the bottom can understand what the bottom can do to a person.Â Not in a patronizing sense, but in a humanizing one, recognizing that all of us are in process. All of us are beggars with

hands extended, though we may reach for different things. Â

The great reformer Martin Lutherâ€™s final written words speak to this.

Â â€œWir sind bettler. Â Hoc est verum.â€•Â â€œWe are all beggars
â€•
this is true.â€•

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