

The Heartbeat of Faith

There is something very tactile about the way my six year old niece, Kelsie, relates to the world. As a small child, and even now, she will readily seek physical contact, fingering the creases on your face as she speaks to you, clasping your hand as she goes to sleep, and demanding concrete answers to her deep theological questions.

One day we were talking about Jesus being with us, and Kelsie was clearly frustrated by the lack of earthly visibility of this Jesus character! Our conversation went something like this:

Kelsie: But I can't see Jesus!

Teresa: Okay, but you can feel him in your heart.

Kelsie: Where? In my heart?

Teresa: Yes, in your heart.

Kelsie: Can you feel him in your heart?

Teresa: Yes!

Kelsie: Can I have a feel?

And with that she placed her hand over my heart and cocked her ear towards my chest, listening intently.

Her action took me by surprise, and turned my mediocre answer into a sharpened learning experience... for me! What a beautiful image: To experience God is to listen to another's heart; and not just to listen metaphorically, but to feel their heartbeat, the pulsing rhythm of their blood, their very life-force.

A temptation in every age is to over-spiritualize Christianity, to reduce it to an intangible, de-historicized message. But this can never be the way of authentic faith, for God entered history, not just to arouse feelings in hearts but to physically transform the created order. Yes, our God mysteriously changes us within; but that conversion of heart demands to be seen, felt, touched in concrete ways that fully engage with the daily practicalities of being human. Is not this the conviction that drives the efforts of the champion of the poor, the peace activist, the prolifer, the marriage educator, the feminist, the ecologist... indeed anyone who strives to bring about righteous relations on our planet?

In her own gentle way, Kelsie was reminding me of all that. And our conversation continued. •



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