Daily Meditation 07-08-24
Jesus and Democracy according to Meister Eckhart

Good morning.

In today's essay, we're meditating on the relationship between Jesus and democracy, as Meister Eckhart put it, 700 years ago -- and, let me say, 450 years before Thomas Jefferson. And obviously, I think this is a very important theme at this time, because democracy is up for grabs, I think, with this forthcoming presidential election.

And sometimes I don't think enough has been made of the question whether Jesus, in a way, set us up for democracy. And in today's meditation, we see that the emphasis on the royal person is very strong, in Jesus understanding of the kingdom of God, or queendom of God. And the point being that Eckhart makes explicit that there's an equality between all people, because we're all born of this very profound connection to the divine. We are all royal people or noble people or aristocrats.

So I'm drawing especially from my book that contains the critical sermons, critically translated German sermons into English, called "Passion for Creation: The Earth-Honoring Spirituality of Meister Eckhart." And especially pages 522 and 523, my commentary on his treatise on the noble person. But this is something that he writes. He says that “humans need to practice equality in human society.” And elaborates:

Since then, Christ's whole nobility belongs equally to us all, and is equally near to us, to him as much as to me. Why do we not receive it equally? Well, you must understand that if someone wants to come by this gift equally, to receive this good and the common nature, which is equally near to all people, you must practice the same equality in human society: being no nearer to yourself than to another, just as in human nature, there is nothing alien, nothing farther or nearer.

And then he elaborates on this understanding in another sermon, when he's talking about compassion: “You are to love, esteem, and consider all people like yourself. What happens to another, be it bad or good, should be for you as if it happened to you.”

And behind all love, he says, there is the demand for equality. “Love will never be anything else than there, where equality and unity are. Between a master and a servant, there is no peace, because there is no real equality.”

So he's talking about a real equality, and moving from a consciousness of power-over, or domination, or one group superior to another, to this level playing field. He says, “A wife and a

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husband are not alike, but in love, they are equal." And so it is: we can be different and yet equal.

It's an interesting insight, because Otto Rank makes that same point in the 20th century. He says, "Too many people in America equate equality with sameness." And he's saying exactly what Eckhart is saying here, that we can be not alike, but equal. And says Eckhart, "There can be no love, where love does not find equality, or does not create equality."

I think each one of these observations from Eckhart, feeds in a rich and substantive way, the very meaning of democracy, when it is being played out in its healthy and full dimension.

He also says that fun and pleasure requires a certain equality between people. His final statement is one we've already seen, but he brings it in so often, and is so rich: "Who then is more royal, than one who was born, on the one hand, from the highest and best that a creature possesses, and on the other hand, from the most intimate depths: the divine nature and its wilderness?" These are his questions. And again, we all come from the same origin, you see, and that's why we share equality.

Now it's interesting that in this treatise by him, he draws on the royal tradition of the Bible, or the royal household responsible for justice. And the book of Hosea plays a big role in this treatise. In the book of Hosea, we read in chapter 5, verse 1. "Listen to this, Priests: Attend, House of Israel, this royal household, you who are responsible for justice." So to be a leader is to be responsible for justice. And the prophet Micah says something similar:

Listen now, you princes of the House of Jacob, rulers of the House of Israel: Are you not the ones who should know what is right? You enemies of good and friends of evil? When they have devoured the flesh of my people and torn off their skin and crushed their bones, then they will cry out to Yahweh, but He will not answer them. That's Micah, chapter 3.

So the poor, the captives, the blind, and the stranger, all these are to be objects of — not objects, but relationships of equality, instead of objects of abuse. And Eckhart is very much on board with that whole vocation that we're all called to, that is inherent in the quality of authentic kingship, whether found in Divinity itself, or in us sons and daughters of divinity, meaning this capacity for justice. And as he says, either finding equality or making it happen. And I think that lies at the heart of the very meaning of democracy.

And so the threat to democracy is a threat to our very sacred-hood, the very profound nature of what it is to be human beings.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.

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