

Author's Preface

Finding My Voice: On Being Seen

I meet a lot of moms like me at the homeschool conventions I attend with my husband. I see myself in their fears, their fatigue, and their public faces. Certain there is a standard they're not meeting, they die privately over their perceived failures, suffering alone the shame and guilt implicit in their humanity. The "little-1" laws of the world judge them to death, and they find these laws everywhere: in their children's play groups, their church Bible studies, their homeschool co-ops, and their best friend's living rooms. They see them in the media, in music, in self-help books, in local whole food crazes, in the perfection of Pottery Barn catalogues, and in the college selection board that will one day decide their children's futures. The voice of the law resides in their hearts and continually tells them they are doing it wrong.

This is one reason, I believe, that they go to homeschool conventions. They know their failure, and they are

looking for some guru who has it all together to throw them a bone and give them a fix, a better way to do it right. Well, I'm no guru, but I am throwing the bone here. It comes from my dead carcass, and throwing it amounts to throwing myself under the bus publicly. But hey, if I'm already dead, what can a bus do to me?

I realize that may sound accusatory, but I don't mean it as an accusation as much as a heads-up. What follows may not be what you'd expect from a homeschooling retrospective. It's not a book of lists and directives. You won't find many "to-do" items inside. Instead, you'll find a narrative memoir that chronicles the education I received through our family's homeschool project. From youthful zeal and idealism to the tempered humility brokenness works, I invite my readers into these chapters of my life.

Writing this book is an act of faith, a declaration of the gospel of grace and the effect it continues to have on my life. This is because writing for publication requires being seen and known, which would be all right if it were a foregone conclusion that being known ensured being loved, but I have lived in the world long enough to know that such love is rare. Human nature jumps on weakness like flies on honey; so, any self-conscious declaration of failure, especially one that links that failure to the ubiquitous human condition, is sure to draw criticism.

Only last night I received notification of a comment on one of my recent blog posts. When I checked it, I was perturbed to find that the commenter had not written to

discuss any of the ideas present in my post, but rather to criticize in lengthy prose my use of the comma, schooling me in grammar like my freshman English teacher. I felt like my post was bleeding red ink that somehow stained my cheeks with public shame. If a grammar critique hit me that hard, what will real criticism do to me? All this person saw was my punctuation error; what would she do with some real material – like my personal sins and failures?

In the science fiction novella *The Great Divorce*, author and theologian C.S. Lewis tells a story of purgatorial ghosts on a day-trip to heaven. Reading it, I discovered another woman like me. Approached by one of the shining, solid beings sent from the inner precincts of heaven to induce her to go “further up and further in,” the woman, aware of her transparent insufficiency, replies, “Can’t you understand anything? Do you really suppose I’m going out there among all those people, like this?” The dialogue between her and the shining being follows:

“But why not?”

“I’d never have come at all if I’d known you were all going to be dressed like that.”

“Friend, you see I’m not dressed at all.”

“I didn’t mean that. Do go away.”

“But can’t you even tell me?”

“If you can’t understand, there’d be no good trying to explain it. How can I go out like this among a lot of people with real solid bodies? It’s far worse than going

out with nothing on would have been on Earth. Have everyone staring through me.”

“Oh, I see. But we were all a bit ghostly when we first arrived, you know. That’ll wear off. Just come out and try.”

“But they’ll see me.”

“What does it matter if they do?”

“I’d rather die.”

“But you’ve died already. There’s no good trying to go back to that.”¹

Any person with the slightest degree of self-awareness will acknowledge that being “seen” is a terrifying proposition. The real person, the genuine article, is a mass of contradictions. He is *simul justus et peccator*, that glorious combination of saint and sinner that Reformation theologian Martin Luther so aptly characterized. Although he bears the image of God Himself, that image is marred and magnified by original sin as it finds practical expression in his life. To be “real” in public is, therefore, akin to being naked in public – worse, the ghostly woman suggests, since it means not being seen so much as being seen through. The fear of transparency is real, and my heart shares this woman’s sentiments when I contemplate going to print: “I’d rather die.”

The response of the solid being, however, does my heart good upon this occasion: “But you’ve died already. There’s no good trying to go back to that.” My identi-

1. C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Pub., 2001), 60-61.

fication with the crucified Christ has already mortified me. What, then, could possibly be the use of such post-humous self-preservation?

I have spent many years writing things that hide unread on my computer. Often, these things have contained admissions of my failed attempts to make much of myself and my kids. This private acknowledgement of my dead works, together with my silent acceptance of the living works of Christ, have certainly done me good. For that goodness to be available to others, however, I know that I need to find my voice. Consider the publication of this book the breaking of the silence and the first fruits of the resurrection Christ has worked in me. I will trust in His righteousness and give Him glory even if that means the death of my own.

I quote the well-known theologian and gadfly Robert Farrar Capon from his *Kingdom, Grace, and Judgment*: “The truth, rather, is that the crosses that will inexorably come...and the death that will inevitably result from them – are, if accepted, all we need. For Jesus came to raise the dead. He did not come to reward the rewardable, improve the improvable, or correct the correctible; he came simply to be the resurrection and the life of those who will take their stand on a death he can use instead of on a life he cannot.”² So, I speak – in a wavering, but audible voice. I pray that the Lord would honor this feeble proclamation of my own death, seeing

2. Robert Farrar Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment: Paradox, Outrage, and Vindication in the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 317.

in it that mustard seed of faith Jesus invoked. May He magnify it to proclaim with deafening intonation the present power of the risen Christ for those who are weary of self-preservation, self-promotion, and self-salvation projects. May He magnify His life in our dead bones and bring about the fruitfulness of the kingdom in our lives and families.

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