

BOUNDARIES

Reflection by Dana Ruttkay

*I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you."
The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The boundary lines
have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage.
Psalm 16:2, 5-6 (NRSV)*

This passage gives me hope.

The psalmist has recognized that the boundaries in his life are a consequence of having chosen to worship God as his LORD rather than "another god" (v.4). The blessings from God are good: the LORD gives the Psalmist counsel and instruction (v.7); the presence of the LORD is there always (v.8); within the boundary is gladness of heart, and security (v.9); and, there is a fullness of joy and guidance in life (v.11).

I, and all those who identify themselves as faithful Christians, can and do say to the LORD "You are my LORD", and it is in the LORD that I seek refuge. I don't know about others but I know for myself that what I perceive as my boundary lines are sometimes dull, blurred, porous, variable, and sometimes it is like looking for good things – the blessings - in the wrong places. At this point I don't have the Psalmist's clarity of the boundaries in my life. Why is that?

Two thoughts have been nagging at me. The first is 'what are the boundary lines I acknowledge in my life', and the second thought is 'how did they get there?'

I have boundaries around how close I let people come to me in emotional and physical proximity. I have boundaries on what I will and will not do, and when I will and will not do activities. *These boundaries are set by me* as I try to resolve the balance between my self-established priorities, the requests of others for my time and attention, my likes and dislikes, and how I have compartmentalized my life. My dedication to God my LORD is in the mix, but it is indistinct. Even though I find myself saying that God my LORD is with me all the time, and I truly believe and embrace that reality, I am not quite at the point when I can honestly declare with my heart and soul, "I have no good apart from you". I am still too self-centered and too self-defining to say that with honesty and integrity.

So, whose priorities are reflected in the various boundaries which are operating in your life?

Your own preferences and priorities, or the preferences and priorities of others such as: work demands, volunteer obligations, family, or friends. How are those working for you? How would you describe the way boundaries are operating in your life: are they bringing joy and order, or confusion, conflict, and chaos?

Secondly, how would you describe the boundary lines you have operating in your life?

Does your life have distinct and obvious separations of activities into compartmentalized segments of time dedicated to one activity sort of like a mosaic of bounded tiles of segregated and dedicated time, OR are the boundaries in your life somewhat indistinct, fuzzy, fluid, resulting in life that is more like a melting pot – like mixing of different colours of paint – to the point where boundaries are so pale and weak as to seem non-existent and everything runs together? How is this working for you?

I truly don't know whether one type is better than the other, and I can argue the benefits and costs of both. That being said, I think the final conclusion is that the best boundaries one can have operating in his or her life are the ones that are the outcomes of surrender to God. With those boundaries one will experience pleasant places - Guaranteed.

As I write this there are two prayers (actually portions of prayers) that have been playing in the background of my soul. Charles de Foucauld's prayer is about surrender to God's will – boundaries – in one's life.

Father, I abandon myself into your hands.
Do with me whatever you will.
Whatever you may do, I thank you.
I am ready for all, I accept all.

And Reinhold Niebuhr's *Serenity Prayer* is about our acceptance of the lines falling in pleasant places.

God, give us grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things
which should be changed,
and the Wisdom to distinguish
the one from the other.

I haven't quite surrendered to the point when I can say, "I have no good apart from you", but I hope to be coming a little closer every passing day. This is my hope.