

Karen Hollis  
August 18, 2019  
Luke 12:49-56  
Resistance

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be reflections of your word to us in Christ Jesus.

Um

Resistance. There's a lot wrapped up in this word. What comes to mind for you when you hear the word resistance?

Resistance to change?

Social resistance? People demonstrating in the streets?

Relationship tension? Power struggle?

Or trying to make good on those positive New Year's resolutions?

When I think about resistance, I think about electromagnetic fields . . . because I'm a weirdo. But hear me out. When one is working with an electromagnetic field, the system is happy as long as you don't change anything. If you increase or decrease the electromagnetic field, resistance goes up during that period of change and then goes back down again. Isn't that fascinating – resistance goes up when you change the electromagnetic field. So something else in the universe doesn't like change! It's not just me! So resistance isn't just a human phenomenon; it is a natural phenomenon and this is only one example from the natural world.

After years of reflection on the phenomenon of resistance in electromagnetism, at my best, I welcome resistance as a part of life and see my own resistance as a teacher . . . it is an indicator that

something is pushing on me . . . an opportunity for learning is acting on me in some way. My resistance isn't trying to ruin my day, but is trying to communicate something. Resistance is a part of life . . . and Jesus knows it.

Throughout the gospels we see many sides to Jesus; in this passage he is a realist. He is not saying he **wants** to bring division to the earth, rather he knows the good news he brings is the source of division. This is true because some embrace Jesus; some resist Jesus; and as we know from holiday conversations with family, not all of us understand Jesus in the same way. It's often with family where there is most potential for a spirited conversation on Jesus, what he values or what he would have to say about the world today.

Did you notice in the passage that Jesus locates the division he brings within families? Where the bonds are stronger and the stakes are higher. The division Jesus describes is along generational lines: between fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, and mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law.

It has been the role of young people since time immemorial to push the boundaries . . . indeed Jesus' own disciples were young people saying yes to truth emerging before their eyes. They may not be able to accurately interpret what is happening in their time, but they know something is happening. They see Jesus preaching love; they watch him as he encounters each person, really seeing them, healing them, and doing so without asking for anything in return. The way of Jesus isn't about making temple sacrifices out of self-interest; it isn't about control . . . this is a new way, the way of love. Love of God, love of self and love of neighbour - they all become wrapped up together. For many young people in the first few centuries after Jesus' resurrection, the invitation to be in Christian community and help bring the kingdom of God on earth outweighs the risks that come with this work, even the social burden it puts on one's family.

In 202 CE in the African city of Carthage there was a 22 year old aristocrat named Vibia Perpetua, recently married and the mother of an infant son, who resolved to undergo baptism along with 4 other

young people. When she was arrested and sentenced to death, she recorded in her diary what happened when her father arrived at the prison:

While we were under arrest, my father, out of love for me, was trying to persuade me and shake my resolution. “Father,” I said, “do you see this vessel, or waterpot, or whatever it is?” “Yes, I do,” he said. “Could it be called by any other name than what it is?” I asked; and he said, “No.” “Well, so too, I cannot be called anything other than what I am, Chrisitan.”

Perpetua wrote, “my father was so angry.” He arrived again a few days later, pleading with her, “Daughter, have pity . . . on me, your father . . . do not abandon me to people’s scorn. Think of your brothers; think of your mother and your aunt; think of your child, who will not be able to live without you. Give up your pride! You will destroy all of us! None of us will ever be able to speak freely again if anything happens to you.”<sup>1</sup>

I don’t know about you, but I’ve never had that much at stake for being Christian . . . Perpetua standing in the truth of her Christian identity, opposite the resistance of her father, who is afraid and does not understand.

Almost all the theologians I read on this scripture stressed what a challenging scripture this is, **because** it appears to be so contrary to the message of peace Jesus brings. Is it, though? Is it contrary to the peace Jesus brings? The deep peace, the lasting peace Jesus brings is not going to be an easy peace.

The peace Jesus brings comes through the transformation of the world, but it also happens in us . . . perhaps it comes into the world through us and the inner work we do. Perhaps Jesus puts pressure on us or gives us something to push up against, a lightening rod for our resistance when we are divided even within ourselves. Perhaps Jesus comes in all of his fullness and watches us deal with ourselves as

---

<sup>1</sup> Beyond Belief (large print), Elaine Pagels, p. 16-18

we encounter him. Whether we come in awe and gratitude, in pain and brokenness, or try to trick him and put him on trial, Jesus shows up fully to do the work of transformation with us.

Perhaps, as we engage Jesus and move through our own resistance . . . as we work through the things that Jesus challenges in us, we become more free to bring the kingdom here on earth.