

Watershed Discipleship: A Way Through?

The first in a series on Watershed Discipleship toddwynward@gmail.com

In early July 2013, Todd Wynward sat down with author and activist Ched Myers to discuss the concept of watershed discipleship and dream about building an alliance among faith-rooted groups engaged in localized, bioregional living. Below are Todd's reflections.

I have to agree with Ched Myers' stark analysis of the current human condition: modern society lies drugged in an "ecocidal slumber." We're fully aware our actions are causing the corrosion of earth's basic life-sustaining systems. We know we have choices. Yet we lay paralyzed, trapped by our compulsive habits and oh-so comfortable lifestyles.

Ched holds up a strange hope to our post-modern paralysis: the Bible. He asserts that "the prophetic traditions indigenous to both testaments may alone be capable of rousing us" from our addictive malaise.

The Bible—our best spur toward urgent action?

It's an unconventional hope for modern progressive folks who—for good reason—run away from anything claiming to be "Bible-based." Yet Ched claims the Bible might be the best tool we've got to get modern America to drop the iPad and get off the couch.

It's an interesting proposition. Do ancient scriptures hold enough social critique to radicalize slumbering evangelicals AND enough social credibility to galvanize cynical progressives? Perhaps. Ched thinks so. He describes the power of the prophetic strands that weave through the Bible:

The reflective poems, warning tales, grand sagas and radical histories of scripture
summon us to remember our origins and the ways of our ancestors;
invite us to imagine and work for a restorative future,
and call us to liberate and heal ourselves and our home places.

Reforms of habits--such as recycling and eating locally and shopping responsibly--are important, Ched affirms, but to become the people we need to be to face our environmental crisis, we'll need to do much more: we'll need to practice transformed living through watershed discipleship.

Watershed discipleship? It's an odd, almost jarring term, invoking and synthesizing two domains rarely joined in our imaginations: one scientific, the other religious. Yet I'm becoming convinced it is exactly this kind of unitive consciousness—both data-driven and deeply spiritual--that is needed if we humans are to play any significant role in our planet's healing.

I've taken the liberty to change a word or two, but I agree wholeheartedly with Ched that those who aspire to watershed discipleship must embrace the following motto: "We will not save a place we do not love; we cannot love a place we do not know; we cannot know a place we have not inhabited." Inhabiting a particular place—experiencing its characteristics and being molded by its constraints, its bounty and its boundaries—is essential to watershed discipleship. It is the "re-placed" identity we as a species must vitally embody if we are to rouse from ecocidal slumber.

So what is watershed discipleship, exactly? In my conversation with Ched this week, it became clear that no one knows quite yet. It's the kind of "guiding framework" that could motivate us to move mountains of malaise and despair, but it needs some clarity. Watershed discipleship remains a "work-in-progress," an intriguing and powerful concept only discovered and defined as we live it out in our places each day. I, for one, want to be part of the journey of discovery.

For further information, check out watersheddiscipleship.org