

Rolheiser: What is love asking of me now?

Several years ago, a colleague of mine suffered a crushing disappointment. Her instinctual temptation was towards anger, towards shutting a series of doors and withdrawing. Instead, wounded in spirit, she asked herself the question, *what is love asking of me now?* In answering that, she found that despite her every instinct to the contrary, love was asking her to move away from bitterness and withdrawal, asking her to stretch her heart in ways it had never been stretched before.

What is love asking of me now? That is the question we need to ask ourselves every time the circumstances of our lives are shaken (by wound or by grace) to a point where we no longer want to respond graciously and lovingly because everything inside of us wants to shut down and withdraw.

Thus ...

- When I have just been through a bitter divorce, when I feel my heart hardening and find myself growing hateful towards someone I once trusted, the question becomes, *what is love asking of me now?*
- When I have lost a loved one to suicide, not just to death but to a manner of death that becomes a prism that recolors every memory of that person so that my love turns to anger, the question becomes, *what is love asking of me now?*
- When a colleague humiliates me at a meeting with insinuations that are untrue and my blood literally boils at the unfairness, the question becomes, *what is love asking of me now?*
- When my own child rejects my faith and values, complete with the hint that I am naïve and out of step with the world and my temptation is to self-pity and (however subtle) to withdraw my love and support, the question becomes, *what is love asking of me now?*
- When a medical diagnosis reveals that my health will be forever compromised and every fiber in my body and spirit wants to sink into anger and depression, the question becomes, *what is love asking of me now?*
- When the church that is my mother-tongue, that gave me the faith, is found to be unfair, to be the bearer of sin, when I see its flaws and am left to ponder the question of how I can stay in a church with that history and those dysfunctions, the question becomes, *what is love asking of me now?*
- When I am betrayed in a relationship, lied to by someone I trusted, when I am tempted in bitterness never to trust anyone again, the question becomes, *what is love asking of me now?*
- When I myself betray a trust, when out of weakness I sin, when I want to wallow in self-hatred or rationalize or deny my weakness, the question becomes, *what is love asking of me now?*

- When an election in the country produces a leader whose personality and policies go against everything I stand for, the question becomes, what is love asking of me now?
- When the parochial world I grew up in begins to give way to a multilingual, multicultural, multiracial, and multi-religious world that leaves me feeling left behind, when paranoia and defensiveness have me desperately trying to hang on to what once was, the question becomes, what is love asking of me now?
- When I live with someone in my family who is dysfunctional and my every desire is to avoid him and live my own life, the question becomes, what is love asking of me now?
- When I have to deal daily with someone who hates me and everything inside me wants to respond in kind, the question becomes, what is love asking of me now.

However, it is not only negative things that upset us in this way, tempt us towards hatred and withdrawal, and leave us in a space that forces us to respond in a new way, huge grace can do the same thing.

Thus ...

- When I finally get that long longed-for promotion, complete with the big salary and a voice in decision-making and the temptation is to inflate and feel superior to those around me, the question becomes, what is love asking of me now?
- When I am invited to be the valedictorian for my graduating class and am on the podium basking in the adulation of the crowd (aware of the jealousy of my classmates) multiple temptations will beset me, most of them unhealthy. The question then becomes, what is love asking of me now?
- When someone blesses me in a deep way with love, gratitude, and affirmation and my temptation is to feed my ego with that blessing, the question becomes, what is love asking of me now?

We cannot protect ourselves against the spontaneous feelings that beset us, both when things go well and when they go badly – and most of those feelings tempt us away from love. So, whenever either a depression or an inflation is tempting us away from what is best and most noble, the question becomes, what is love asking of me now?