

CrossWalk: Oasis for the Persecuted Faith Seekers

This week we kick off CrossWalk's Capital Campaign, A Shelter in Life's Storms. Each week, we will celebrate how CrossWalk offers shelter for many as they endure myriad forms of storms. Our hope is that we will be reminded of how critically important CrossWalk is for so many, and how important it is that we take care of this space so that the work can continue indefinitely. We hope it sparks a deeper level of generosity as we consider all the lives that are impacted. During a chaotic time in our country when we don't know what to do, we can be confident that CrossWalk's vision-born mission will be a voice and a light of shalom, healing, hope – shelter no matter the storm.

Over the years, it has become increasingly clear that a significant number of people find their way to CrossWalk because they are looking for different ways to understand and practice their faith. Many have found CrossWalk to be an oasis for those faith seekers who find themselves in the desert of deconstruction and reconstruction. A part of that journey requires a taste of persecution – a focal point of one of Jesus' beatitudes:

You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom. Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort, and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don't like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble. – Matthew 5:10-12 (MSG)

If you've chosen to pursue deconstruction and reconstruction – often because you could no longer thrive in other expressions of faith – you have tasted persecution in one form or another. We face it from the company in which we dare raise questions. We face it in different ways from the loudest voices of Christianity proclaiming that they own the truth. We face it from well-meaning people we love. We face it from not-so-well-meaning people we struggle to love or like, because sometimes they can be mean. Of course, we also face internal persecution that comes with self-doubt as we recognize that we are barbecuing holy cows. While at times incredibly freeing, life-giving, and exhilarating, the journey can also be daunting, lonely, filled with emptiness and despair. *Is it just me, or does any of this ring true for you, too?*

We are not alone in our quest to find more. Jesus himself underwent the process. So did his followers. There is a fascinating account experienced by the Apostle Peter found in [Acts 10](#). The story begins with a non-Jewish man named Cornelius, a Centurion in command of at least 100 Roman soldiers, stationed in the port town of Caesarea. Known for being an honorable, generous, and prayerful man, he experienced a vision. Pay attention: the Roman Centurion experienced a vision. Let that sink in. The message received was to seek out Peter to hear his message. He sent a couple of soldiers to Joppa – 30 miles south of the Caesarea.

Peter was in Joppa, visiting a friend who was tanner. The home/business was a place that was inherently unclean giving the prevalence of dead animals. Read: not a holy space where God would choose to show up. While he was in prayer around noon, he experienced a vision. Three times in a row, a sheet was lowered from heaven full of non-Kosher "foods" which Peter was instructed to eat. Each time, Peter refused out of his strict adherence to his Jewish tradition forbidding it. The voice from heaven countered him, however, telling him "not to call unclean what God has made clean." Pay attention: the voice challenged long held Jewish traditions and went against scriptural teaching. What an experience! Nothing could have prepared him for it. The inner turmoil surely tormented him. Did he persecute himself for even thinking such thoughts?

As he was still thinking about it, the soldiers sent by Cornelius arrived, asking for him. Peter sensed the Spirit telling him to go with the men to Caesarea and share what he knew about Jesus with them. So, he went. Pay attention: Peter willingly went with Roman soldiers on a two-day hike to meet with Captain Cornelius. How terrifying!

Cornelius prepared for his arrival by bringing together his family to listen to whatever he had to say. As Peter was teaching them, Cornelius' family experienced a baptism of the Spirit of God that had them speaking in tongues (a sign from Pentecost). Seeing what was happening, Peter invited them to be baptized into the Jesus-following community, which they all embraced. Pay attention: Peter just baptized an entire household of Gentiles. Roman soldier Gentiles. This was crazy. Yet he remembered the lunchtime vision – do not profane what God made clean.

The Jewish Jesus followers in Jerusalem heard about it. When Peter was in town, they let him have it. I'm sure that was a pleasant conversation, right? A taste of persecution for doing the thing he sensed God was calling him to do. A taste of persecution for extending grace. Pay attention: honoring the nudge of God may not sit well with other God-followers, even friendly ones.

Taking heat is part of the deal, I think, even if it's for grace.

As long as I have been in any form of Christian leadership, I have experienced pushback when I have called for movement from and toward different expressions of shalom. I am certain that I am not perfect (which undoubtedly

contributed to the pushback at times). Personality aside, however, in many (if not most) cases, the central issue was about choosing a better way over a good way. The status quo wasn't necessarily bad, yet shalom beckoned forward. Heeding that call was the better move, but naturally resulted in change, which always stirs things up. My experience going through it has pretty much always included inner turmoil, external pressure, self-checking, and moving forward. This is the process. It lasts the whole of our lives. This is good news – it means that the faith we seek is increasingly knowable no matter how deep we go.

Shalom's depths are unfathomable, and so long as there is a lack of shalom in the world, the call of shalom will be with us, too, inviting us to take risks on grace, to stand with and for those who need our support. To make some "good trouble" (John Lewis). If we're not making joyful, shalomy noise, we may be missing the mark. Pastor and Professor Gene L. Davenport writes about consequences of starting and getting in good trouble: "Disciples are never punished by the state simply for violating this or that law, although for purposes of legality an indictment will be based on one or another specific law. They are punished because they threaten the entire system. The true offense is the disciple's very existence" (70).

Jesus got in a lot of good trouble. He broke long-held traditions and got pushback every time. His very being challenged the system. Yet he couldn't help himself. He noted that he only did what he saw Abba doing. He was living in shalom and therefore was impelled and compelled in all he thought and did to promote shalom. He was living in what already was in God's realm. When we have breakthrough moments of epiphany and live into it, we find ourselves breathing new air.

A friend decided one day to stop believing in God. He immediately felt liberated! I don't think it's because there is no God, but possibly that the construct he had of God was so incomplete, so boxed-in with traditional thinking, that it was more of a straitjacket than a wingsuit. He was (and we are) meant to fly. That declaration of atheism, an act of heresy, was the most God-honoring thing he could have done.

[Oscar Romero](#) was steeped in shalom, giving him clarity on how much good trouble needed to be started in El Salvador. Romero's person and presence calling for shalom cost him his life. He extends the invitation beyond individual faith seekers to churches, encouraging them to get comfortable making its people and the world uncomfortable (71-72):

A church that does not provoke crisis, a gospel that does not disturb, a word of God that does not rankle, a word of God that does not touch the concrete sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed – what kind of gospel is that? Just nice, pious considerations that bother nobody – that's the way many people would like our preaching to be. Those preachers who avoid every thorny subject so as not to bother anyone or cause conflict and difficulty shed no light on the reality in which they live...

CrossWalk is not that kind of church, is it? I'm not that kind of pastor, am I? CrossWalk is an OASIS for those seeking more – even at the cost of breaking with tradition – in part because I have been in the process myself and cannot help but keep going. I know how hard the process is, and I know how important it is to speak into the thorny subjects. I also know how helpful it is to be in an environment that supports the dialogue. We matter.

We don't always connect deconstruction and reconstruction with this kind of thinking, yet we should. I have not discovered anyone who has undertaken the task of pursuing a truly deeper, more expansive faith only to make their worldview smaller. From what I've seen in myself and others, the growth leads us to be less self-centered and more compassionate toward all others. Which is costly and risky in a radically individualized, self-centered culture. As Jeane DeCelles, a leader in the Catholic Charismatic movement noted, there is a price to pay (73): "Discipleship does have its costs – anyone who has dared to bring the gospel to bear on his or her own life knows that. Whether we feel it or not may be a good litmus test for discerning if we are truly following on his path or pursuing a false trail."

Jesus did say that his Way was easy and his burden light, but he was comparing himself to the perfectionist agenda being promoted by Jewish leaders of his day. Jesus also told people to pick up their cross and follow him. The Way of grace is easier, and yet shalom takes us into risk.

Aramaic translator, Neil Douglas-Klotz, in his helpful little book, [Prayers of the Cosmos: Reflections on the Original Meaning of Jesus' Words](#), translates encouraging words from Jesus' Beatitude to all who are on the reconstruction journey: "Consider adversity as an incitement to take another step." And as you do, know that at CrossWalk you are in good company as you make good trouble. Here is a space for you to rest, regroup, recenter, recharge, reevaluate, and recollect yourself with other on the journey. Here lies an OASIS for you and other faith seekers looking for more.

Watch the teaching related to this post on our YouTube channel ([YouTube.com/CrossWalkNapa](https://www.youtube.com/CrossWalkNapa)) or listen via your preferred podcast provider (search CrossWalkNapa). Unless otherwise noted, references noted are sourced from [Following the Call: Living the Sermon on the Mount Together](#), which will inform [CrossWalkNapa](#) teachings throughout 2025.