

## Divine Compass

“ For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.”

I don't know if any of you are feeling the same way, but recent national and international events have left me feeling utterly disoriented in terms of my hopes and fears for this world that God has so graciously given into our care. I must admit that I frequently ponder God's wisdom in this decision especially when I gaze upon images of war, hunger, and desolation---all of which are quite frankly unnecessary evils caused by humankind's lust for power, wealth, and domination. We can make some arguments against that last statement, but in the end, if we are honest, we know that most of what afflicts the human condition in a negative way is almost always caused by other human beings.

And then there are those bright and shining moments in which the courage, compassion, brilliance and beauty of the best of humanity shines forth and has the power to take our breath away. Who among us have is not captivated by those moments in our common lives when we see people responding to one another, not with fear or competition, but with love and compassion that transcends tribe, political party, or geopolitical boundaries. But then, during commercial breaks or in the ads that pepper the margins of our computer screens messages fill the air that say we can find happiness by buying the latest, largest most expensive television, or an advertisement for another television program in which the way to get attention, is to throw chairs or win some game and become a champion by how well we can cheat and lie. Yes, we can turn these images off and read a book, but my point is that they have become so pervasive and normalized at this point that even if we never turn the television or computer on, our lives and socio-cultural discourse are influenced by what is out there.

I have to tell you, I feel utterly and totally disoriented by it all. If we are people who are seeking to anchor our lives in the joy and grace of God how do we find equilibrium in the midst of so many conflicting events, images, and worldviews; what compass can guide us through life, a compass that doesn't find us either rejecting the world or hiding from it? As I have been thinking on these things, I was reading and came across the Scripture with which I began this piece from Paul's letter to Timothy: “For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.”

I think we are probably living in just such a time. In our increasingly individualistic culture, private feelings seem to have become the highest form of truth for which we care to aspire. If I can say something, no matter how stupid, hateful or harmful, really loudly over a 24 hour news period, or if I can Tweet it, post it on the wall on Facebook, or send it out over You Tube, well then suddenly I am Prophet. But there is an antidote to this madness, and it is as old as time

itself. When the world seems as if it is spinning into chaos, we can find a compass, find our orientation by keeping our eyes fixed on God and locating ourselves in that tender intersection located between what the world tells us we should be, think, or feel over against our belief that we are made in image of a loving, merciful, compassionate Creator.

We can know whom we are and what we are meant to be about by the story of the power and purposes of God. Locating our understanding of our humanity in God's purposes for all of us, we are given the power to be free from the strong social forces, prejudices, and behaviors of many who do not yet know such a story, but still love and care for the world in which we live; be hope in and for this world.

We go forward in an often-nonsensical social environment by rejoicing in the sense of hope that comes from the realization that God does not leave us alone, and is always at work in our world pouring beauty and truth into the human equation. The divine compass resides within all of us. This compass always points us toward, beauty, hope, compassion and grace—even if it seems that the magnetic pull of fear, inanity or violence has a greater power. If you feel lost or are trying to find your way through a world that seems to be going crazy, trust that you too have this holy compass. Still your mind and take breath deep breath—train your eyes to see that God is alive and guiding us through it all.

Grace and Peace, Stephanie+