

Redemption

MISHPACHA JUMP · SUNDAY, AUGUST 20, 2017

by Amanda Jump

So much gets lost in translation these days. Most of us prefer zingers on social media to checking in on a neighbor, and some of that has more to do with fear than hate. (Yes, me too.) I beg of my social media neighbors, friends, family, and acquaintances, to permit me to offer a bit of redemption here – for my own disclosures and weakness.

There are stories I have not told, though some are written rather blatantly across the whole of my life. These are places I would prefer not to go because of the vulnerability they uncover. It seems, however, that being a mom of three at home more often requires that I bare my soul in text with someone than in person, as I find myself in solitude more often than not. Herein lay my every battle: the pen is my gift and my curse – blessed by the Father but skewed by my own flesh. This is where I do war. This is where the Father meets me and where the Devil seeks me out. *It is both.*

I cannot apologize for the gift, but I can strive to make good on my vows – to seek and to distribute His heart freely. Freely I have been given shelter as an orphan (more than once!); freely I have been healed of physical and emotional sicknesses; freely I have been loved by Him. What more could I ask? What more could I do? My pen and my heart belong to Him.

“The Devil is a skillful liar, and we cannot expect him to stop at words in his lying. He will resort to lying signs and feelings and experiences in his attempts to shake us from our faith...”

– Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life*

I have to believe that my life and my story is of no less value than another's, though I do struggle with that belief at times. Enter my childhood, if you will, in remembrance of your own – in remembrance of things that were deep and precious and troubled, things for which you had not yet a learned vocabulary but felt as strongly as any mature man or woman, things that became the stepping stones and guide rails of your life... things that later disappointed, disillusioned, or betrayed you. Enter these next paragraphs with your heart, please, and hear my own.

I don't know which happened first, the doll or the church, but I'm not sure that it matters. I grew up in poverty, so it was no small deal when my Grandparents came to visit one year and told my sister and I to pick out *any* toy, *any* doll, *any* one thing at all that we each desired from Toys-R-Us.

Up until this point I had never even been inside a Toy-R-Us. I remember walking in and feeling like a pauper, quite out-of-place, but magically transformed into a princess for that small moment.

Here is the doll that I picked:



Yes, I still have it... 😊

So it is that my obsession with all people of color began, along with a discouragement about my own ghastly – *I mean* – ghostly skin.

My father was a preacher and he had a friend with the same surname who was also a minister in town. She was lovely. So lovely. Her name was Brenda Jenkins. She pastored the church and her husband served as body guard, often standing through services at the side or back door. He looked the part too. Of course, I was too young to comprehend why there was a need for a body guard at the door in this inner city church; I just thought it was cool at the time.

Not once could my sister and I leave that house of God without shades of pink and red lipsticks being smooched all over our faces. So many beautiful black women and so much love. These are my best childhood memories, the ones I've guarded and kept locked safe in my physical treasure chest. These are the moments that could never be ripped from me, no matter what the nightly news said.

At some point growing up, my mom and dad had us watch *Roots*. This secured in my mind and heart the injustices past and the admiration with which I viewed the black community around me. To endure such suffering at the hands of white people in the past and still welcome our family on a Sunday night spoke much of the dignity and strength of this community and the women of color I had come to regard as so beautiful.

My obsession grew. All of my preferences were colored black. From boyfriends to music to beauty standards to the Harvard bias test that proved what I already knew – *I was biased towards people of color*. By which I mean, *I thought better of black people than white*.

I still prefer their music. I still think black women are the most beautiful on the planet. I did try (twice!) to marry black men, but God had other plans in that arena; ultimately, I had to surrender my preference there.

All of my church experiences had been multi-racial and that did not change as an adult (until my early thirties). I spent many years in Sumter, South Carolina. Though the church I became a part of was well-mixed, the racial tension was still very visible outside of those walls (and sometimes within too).

I remember the first time a black woman called me "racist". It was while I was working at a jewelry store in that town. It struck me as irrational and I was shocked. I think I simply replied, "You don't even know me..." because that was all the shock would permit to be said in the moment. I had enforced a policy regarding jewelry repair that was common policy, white or black, but she had taken it personally.

This was the first time I realized that I too could be judged solely by the color of my skin. Though I had experienced the wary glances and ostracizing while living in Guam, the issue took on a whole new life after this encounter. In many ways, I had been sheltered by the Church from the tensions that remained within the community and are further strained today.

My high school experience is even more befuddling when I consider the weekly riots that occurred in the lunch room. Here too I remained outside of the issue; I found myself sitting next to young black men in my classes, young men who upon seeing my timidity and genuine naivety, often took up for me as would a big brother. There were classes I might have hated had it not been for this one saving grace – young men of color taking up my defense from the others in class who were capable of ripping the heart out of me altogether. I thank God for them. (I wish I knew where you were today, Philippe and Paul...)

Broken Pedestals and Broken Hearted

I survived my twenties and the Ferguson riots with my pedestals firmly in tact, but then came our assignment in D.C.. Looking back, I believe the Devil meant to destroy me there. Looking back, I believe that God always meant it for my good and for the tearing down of the childhood idol yet in my heart.

No matter how beautiful, good, or winsome an idol shines, how many of you know it is still an idol? And idols will take you down the road of spiritual death.

Our students never believed me when I would tell them that I thought black girls were the most beautiful in the world. They had no idea how concretely my whole concept of beauty had been shaped at an early age by those black women and their lipstick. Nonetheless, I would tell our students this because it seemed they needed to hear it – from me – a white woman -- that highlighted image the media or propaganda had idealized in their eyes.

Many of you already know, my husband and I worked in a public, urban, charter, boarding school as houseparents to seven middle-school aged girls. They lived with us from Sunday night to Friday morning after the school drop-off. The school provided trauma-informed care, and we were all trained to deal with the various traumas that come along with inner-city life: namely, poverty, physical abuse, drug abuse, and single-parent homes, or children in the foster care system. In many ways, the experience was simply an add-on to our prior group home experience, which was something we were not prepared for upon entering a 'boarding school'. Contrasting the two, I would have to say that middle schoolers are far more volatile and emotionally-charged than the teenagers we had served in the group home. Add trauma and a hostile race war to that and it was, at times, hellish.

Add now to that election year: *Clinton vs. Trump*.

Our family (along with many others) received death threats, got cussed out repeatedly, and were accused of being “racist” countless times by students, their parents, and sometimes staff. The hostilities of the race war were now under our own roof, touching our personal and work lives, not to mention the clueless lives of our own children who had certainly done nothing to deserve such ill circumstance. The entire year for us became one of learning how to walk out Jesus’ words about loving one’s enemies, and sometimes, I’m sure we failed to meet His standards, however civil we remained.

Have you ever lived with someone who hated you or that you hated? Your father? Mother? Ex-friend? That ugly co-worker?

But have you ever had to live with them? Serve them dinner. Bandage their wounds. Read them Bible stories? Tell them everything will be okay while the rest of the world is screaming *at you and at them* that it won’t?

Of course, these students were not our real enemies, and we knew that, though it is admittedly difficult to remember that when a chair is being hurled at your head, a death threat made, and someone you want to love is screaming day-in and day-out that you hate them. Yes, it is true that they were not the enemy, but it wasn’t easy to see it that way in the moment.

Then came election night. Our students were anxious and despairing. We all went to bed before the race was called. When we woke to news of Trump’s victory, we knew it was going to be a tough morning. Several students threatened suicide, some cried, yelled, and became visibly angry. We did not understand their reaction until one of our students confided that one of the BLM teachers had told them that Trump was going to bring back a literal slavery. Our students were terrified! – And no wonder!

My blood boiled. This was not politics to our children; *this was terror*. I cannot erase their fear and torment on that day from my mind. Every time I see another fabrication being sensationalized in the news, I see their faces – I see their terror – I see their tears. And I wonder, if everyone saw what I saw that day, would we still be having the same arguments today? Would either side still be spewing such hate? – If they’d seen the effect those lies had on these children, wouldn’t they more closely guard their hearts and mouths?

Ultimately, we fulfilled our year contract, but not before all of the white staff was accused of being “white saviors”, “toxic”, “privileged”, and “racist”. We were “white saviors” because we had come to rescue the poor, urban youth – in their perspective. We were “toxic” because we didn’t know we were “racist” and weren’t doing enough to change the social sphere. (I guess being on the front lines trying to care for these youth was not the change they wanted...?) And, of course, as we all know since last year, ALL white people are “privileged” and “racist” – a sentiment, by the way, that is racist (i.e., judging someone’s character *solely by the color of their skin* rather than permitting for individual experiences and attitudes).

I wanted to run away. I wanted to weep on the red carpet – the red carpet of that church that had embraced me in my youth and naivety despite the color of my skin. I had gone to D.C. on a mission to love, on a mission to help, on a mission to give. By the end, in many ways, it felt as if we'd been sent to hug a brick wall – only a brick wall that could talk and throw bricks!

This experience gripped my heart and devastated me in a way that only God can fully understand, knowing me beginning to end. And it is in light of these things that I want to repeat the Watchman Nee quote:

“The Devil is a skillful liar, and we cannot expect him to stop at words in his lying. He will resort to lying signs and feelings and experiences in his attempts to shake us from our faith...”

– **Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life***

The Liar

So, I have written much lately on the political topic of hate in our world today, but I think I have short-changed you, myself, and God by neglecting to disclose what God was doing in my own life that prompted me to write in the first place.

I recently began reading a book about political and mass brainwashing. It is not a Christian book, and it was written by a psychiatrist/psychologist who lived during the Korean and World Wars. He was captured briefly during World War II and tells of his experience then, but he primarily speaks of the many POW's and Holocaust survivors that he treated in his office after the wars. I picked this book up as research for a fiction story I had started and with little more thought than that.

Oh, how our Lord works in such wondrous ways!

As I began to read this book, page after page, late night after late night, an idea began to grow and something dawned on me: ***I knew these tactics.*** I recognized *every single one.* They were the same devices and strategies I saw the Devil using in my own mind – to turn my own mind against myself, against others, and, especially, against Christ! And this very simple revelation has freed me in ways I did not expect.

Brainwashing, or “menticide”, begins with “mental chaos and verbal confusion” (Meerlo, 1956, pg 28). If you're a POW this may translate into being made to stand and listen to a barrage of nonsensical questions or ideologies on repeat, for days on end. Besides the physical strain, the mind begins to lose fortitude because of the lack of sleep. I think in present day society, “verbal confusion” and, thus, chaos is prevalent. Everyone is redefining the dictionary and if two people are ever talking about the exact same thing, well, it is a miracle.

In confusion comes “panic” and “unsteadiness”, as “norms are undermined” and the prisoner “cannot believe in anything objective any more” (Meerlo, 1956, pg 29).

Hope. A future. These things are also removed. They tell the prisoner that their friends and loved ones have betrayed them. That everything they thought was true, was a lie.

Interrogations and oppression weigh in as every error and mistake made by the accused *in trying to answer his accusers* is pointed out. The prisoner can in no way trust himself now; that much is proven true...

But the final and most important stage is still more devastating. Latent or suggested guilt is now used to change the prisoner’s story *in favor of his accusers* – “...now completely conditioned and accepting his own imposed guilt, [the prisoner] is trained to bear false witness against himself and others. He doesn’t have to convince himself any more through autohypnosis; he only speaks ‘his master’s voice’” (Meerlo, 1956, pg 31).

(The parallels of this strategy are everywhere in our country at present.)

This reminded me much of another Watchman Nee quote:

“God is well able to deal with our sins; but he cannot deal with a man under accusation, because such a man is not trusting in the Blood. The Blood speaks in his favor, but he is listening instead to Satan. Christ is our Advocate, but we, the accused, side with the accuser. We have not recognized that we are unworthy of anything but death; that, as we shall shortly see, we are only fit to be crucified anyway. We have not recognized that it is God alone that can answer the accuser, and that in the precious Blood He has already done so.”

– The Normal Christian Life, pg 24

That it is God alone who can answer the accuser... what a relief!

Confusion, chaos, panic, unreliable objectivities, interrogation, oppression, and latent and contrived guilt – *the Devil has used every single one against me in cyclical pattern, year after bloody year.*

But no more.

I see now his tactics for what they are: *brainwashing*. Only God can answer my accuser – and He already did! Praise God!

“He whom the Son sets free is free indeed” (John 8:36).

Idols and Masters (A brief wrap-up)

Brainwashing is no longer a catch-phrase for me. When I use it, I am addressing a larger enemy- at-large. And it is with these thoughts and with great joy in this new freedom (from mental tyranny) that I speak of the lies of the Devil in our world, which is in our minds and hearts.

What is the new lie the Devil meant to plant in my head and heart? – It is that *all black people hate me. That I should be afraid of them. That all hope of a future relationship with them has now been utterly destroyed. That no matter how ‘nice’ they might seem at first, under the pretense they all think I’m just like the rest...*

It doesn’t matter much if this lie even has a measure of truth – and it may. What matters is that I’ve seen it for what it is: a lie *meant to divide* me from brothers, sisters, and strangers.

It’s true that I have a lot more experience and hurt to surrender now, but it is truer that God’s Church is so beautiful... every color, every tongue, every ethnicity. *So lovely*. Even this ghostly white I’ve grown to accept. And like Jonathan to David, I will bind my heart to the Church. I love her because Christ loves her – all of her.

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. – Galatians 3:28

Or shall we say:

There is neither black nor white, neither poor nor rich, nor is there republican and democrat, for you are all one in Christ Jesus?

The writer here is not denying the existence of these social differences, but he is affirming the fact that **God is not partial**: He is a rewarder of and an Advocate for **all** who seek him.

May His name be praised.

Meerlo, Joost A. M.. *The Rape of the Mind*, 1956. Grosset & Dunlap: New York.