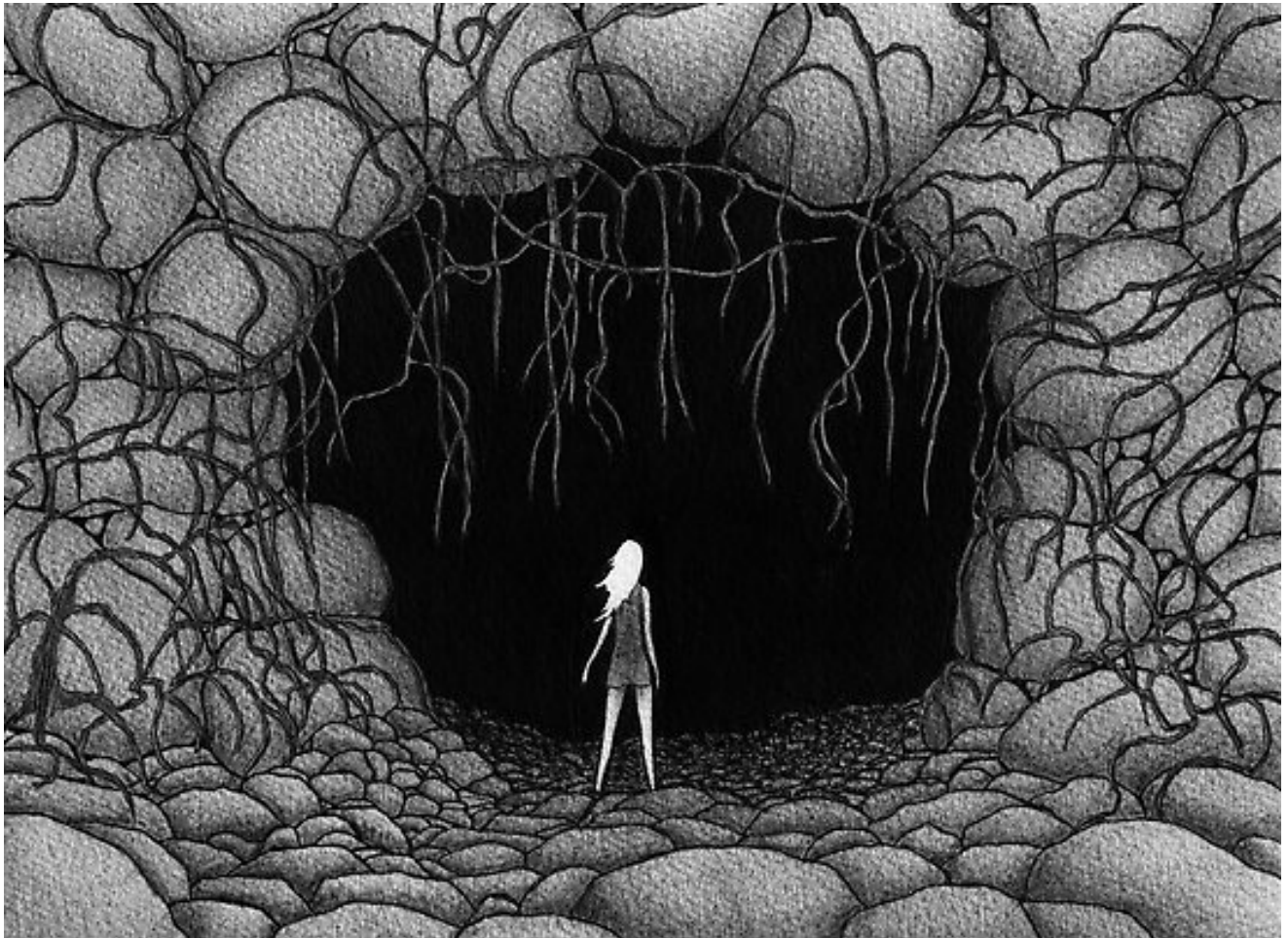


The Cave – A Call to Maturity



What I share with you today began with this picture called The Cave. It is a drawing by David Hayward of a young woman, standing at the entrance to a dark cave. She knows this cave is a part of her very self, and she is arguing with herself about whether to take a look inside.

I have carried this image in my mind since I first saw it last fall. It has made sense of a deep longing I've had for the church for many years. To me this picture is a call to acknowledging and embracing all that is hidden in us that we'd prefer to hide or forget. It is a call to mature, and to become all that we can.

Nan Merrill writes in her translation of Psalm 107

And know yourself! Let your aim be to recognize who you are.

Aspire to live as sons and daughters of Divine Love,

To enshrine the earth with divinity,

To honour all relationships as sacred, and to live in peace and in balance with all living things.



So here is my first question ... do you know yourself?

I like this picture ... the girl taking a look inside ... she's peeking behind the eye, looking past the exterior. She wants to know who is inside.

Donald Miller, the author of the book *Scary Close* writes "The reality is people who allow themselves to be known are often even more respected than those who don't. In the end, we trust and are comforted by those who are brave enough to be known."

And now a quote from Timothy Keller: "To be loved but not known is

comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us."

So here is my first mystery for you: **to be fully known is the only way we can be fully loved.** And this is not just about being known by someone else, but also about knowing ourselves.

And here is my second mystery for you: **the more I know myself, the more I will know God.** If you have reached a place where you just can't seem to get any closer to God, where he remains somewhat distant and unknown, your gateway to break-through could be risking getting closer to yourself ... the more you embrace all that is hidden in your dark, hidden self, the more you will discover the Light of the Creator within yourself. He is waiting for you in the cave.

So, going back to David Hayward's picture, if you imagine it as a place inside of us, what do you think might be hidden in that cave?

This is my list: depression, mental illness, sexual orientation, addictions, fears, past hurts and traumas, faults and failings, things we can't forgive, parts of ourselves we despise and loathe, grief and deep loss, codependency, ego, all our triggers and soap boxes.

How do we feel about what is hidden in our cave? Our dark side?



I think that for me and for many people, what is hidden in the cave, has become my enemy within. This hidden stuff seems to have a mind of its own and at times it works against me. It limits me, trips me up, stops me being who I want to be. It frustrates and annoys me. At times I have loathed my inner me, my inner enemy.

I know you won't like me for asking you this, but how did Jesus tell us to treat our enemies? ... As always he tells us to love, love, love. Learning to Love ourselves may be the toughest thing God

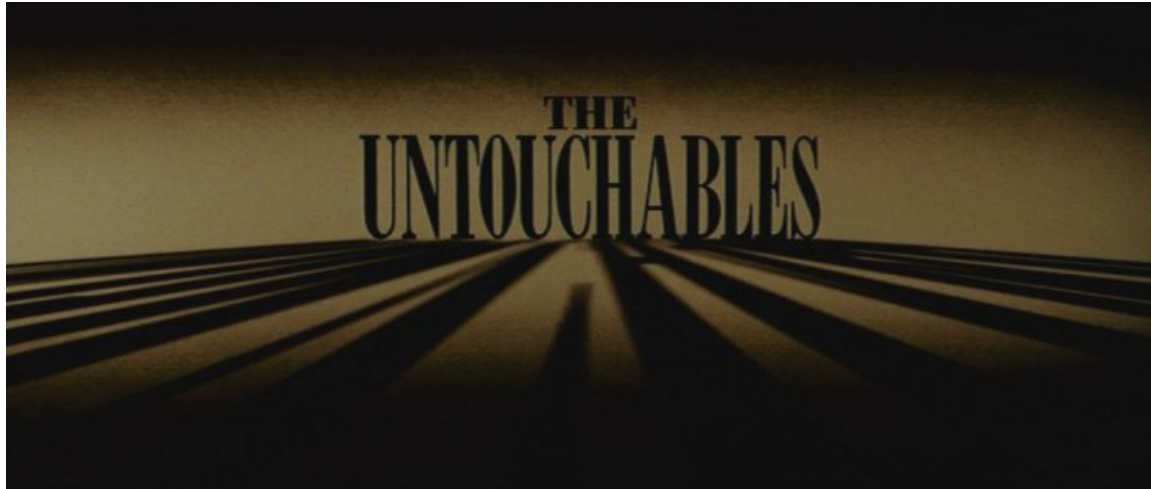
will ever ask of us. Truth be told, it can be the epitome of Loving our enemy.

And therefore, should we ever decide to enter our cave we have to make a decision to be clothed only in Love. We cannot go in there to drive out the darkness; all guns blazing, whips cracking, bombs exploding. Remember the cave usually holds pain, trauma, fear.

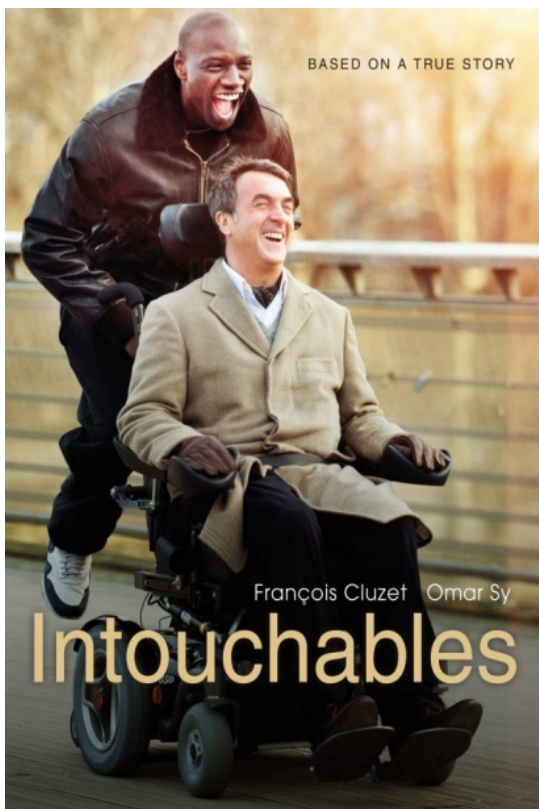
So what kind of baggage will we need to lay down? Could I invite you to close your eyes for a moment and picture yourself standing at the entrance to your

imaginary cave? If you are to enter clothed only in love, what are you going to need to let go of?

Here's my list: self-accusation, all control, all our "I can fix this" attitudes, all self-indulgence, self-pity, at its entrance.



Our caves contain that within us which feels unreachable, inaccessible and untouchable. Parts of ourselves which we cannot change. Not by prayer and tears, nor by monumental human effort.



So here is my third mystery for you: **Love is the key to transformation.**

I only got the new name for my untouchables this Christmas when I watched this fabulous French movie called The Intouchables.

Those out-of-reach parts of me which Jesus and I have embraced and loved and are becoming healed are now a gift to me – they have an ability to connect me, to put me in touch with God and others. They are the means to a deep resonance within me – not

coming from my unhealed pains any more, but from that which is now alive, healing and hopeful.

Perhaps we fear transformation because we are afraid we'll lose ourselves or we won't recognize who we are any more.

Here's another mystery; **the more we are transformed by Love, the more we become ourselves!** People often quote "less of me, more of you Jesus" ... I have found the opposite of that ... the more I allow Him into my dark side, the more of the real me there is.



The more I give God's love freedom in my cave, the less of my junk there is and the more of Fi I discover. Letting Jesus teach me how to love myself hasn't shrunk me, it has expanded and enlarged me! And that makes me better at loving others. Isn't it weird ... the treasure hidden in my cave is me? And the treasure hidden in your cave is you! Blows my mind!

I wonder what it would be like to live without a dark side, to live freely and authentically. This is a mature life; a life that has learned to embrace Love within and without. We describe such people as transparent. These are people who are not obsessed with themselves and their needs. They are humble people because they are completely real and without pretense; they know who they are and they know their limitations. They are at peace with themselves. They are living

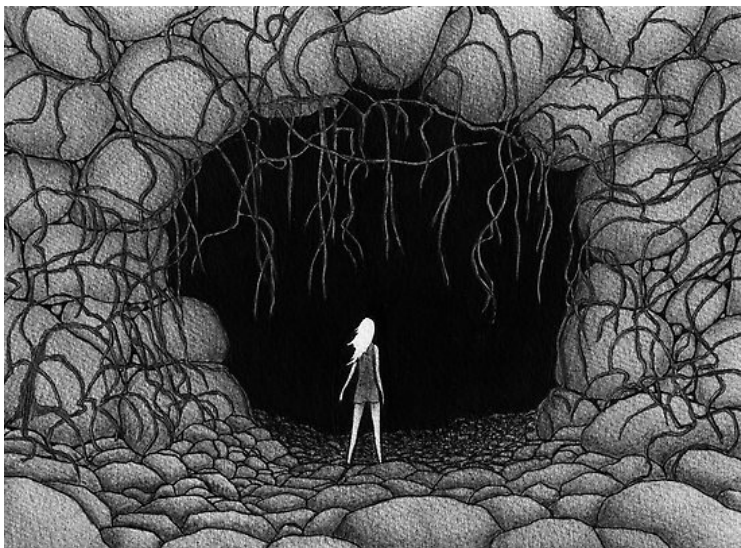
miracles, and they know it's because of something or Someone bigger than themselves. These people have come to a perfect balance of loving God, loving others and loving themselves without hierarchy and without judgment. This harmony leaks out of them. It's written all over their countenance. You can almost touch it when you're with them. It's kind of like Trinity...

So today I am giving us a call to maturity. There is no other way if we're to mature ... we have to take care of our darkness within, learn to love our enemy within ... it's how we will grow up ...

But I must caution you to please use wisdom as you approach your dark side. Don't publicly humiliate it. Don't flaunt it. Choose carefully who you share it with. It's not to be raped or assaulted, trampled or flogged. God calls us to Love. So choose a safe person to explore your cave with. Let Jesus carry the Lantern that lights your way. Let Him lead you ... He will if you ask Him.

Your journey will be unique. God only knows by what means He will heal you. It is not for me to tell you what you're going to need to do. There is no formula. All that is needed is that you ask Him, and you follow Him.

Jesus spent time in a cave. Some think he was born in a cave. Most think he was



buried in a cave. It was a dark place, just like our caves. But it was also the place of his resurrection. It was the place of transformation. Out of death came an extraordinary freedom of new life. Death and darkness were transformed by Love. There is nothing more powerful than Love! After all, God is Love.

I believe that the Father offers us the same hope. When we meet Him in our cave, He gives us our own resurrection, our own transformation. And He does it all through the power of Love, same as He did for Jesus. Have courage dear friends, let not your hearts be troubled or afraid.

Finishing with a quote from Richard Rohr ...

Human consciousness does not emerge at any depth except through struggling with your shadow. I wish someone had told me that when I was young. It is in facing your conflicts, criticisms, and contradictions that you grow up. You actually need to have some problems, enemies, and faults! You will remain largely unconscious as a human being until issues come into your life that you cannot fix or control and something challenges you at your present level of development, forcing you to expand and deepen. It is in the struggle with our shadow self, with failure, or with wounding, that we break into higher levels of consciousness. I doubt whether there is any other way.

Richard Rohr. Feb 16, 2015

