



Reflection for October 7, 2020

Vida Dutton Scudder [transferred]

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." - John 8:12

It is through creating, not possessing, that life is revealed. – Vida Dutton Scudder

Vida Dutton Scudder (1861-1954) was a scholar and social activist whose life's work was to reconcile personal Christian spiritual practices and a social vision of equality. Working with and for women, she insisted that no real social change is possible without attending to the personal spiritual lives of all people. She was critical of philanthropy, for example, because it does not bring about the transformation that Christianity promises:

[T]he brave helpless experiments of philanthropy and reform . . . are inspired in the main by moral passion and social compunction of the purest. But the plain fact is that they have the feebleness of reflex action. They spring, not from life itself, but from the pitying contemplation of life, which is a very different thing. They inspire reverence, they even play an essential minor part in modern life; but we can never look to them for adequate social regeneration. [Socialism and Character, (Houghton Mifflin Co. 1912)]

Vida Dutton Scudder challenges us to recognize the difference between living in solidarity with the vulnerable and keeping our distance while giving to programs designed to support them. She challenges us to balance private prayer with social action. We need both, she argues:

If prayer is the deep secret creative force that Jesus tells us it is, we should be very busy with it . . . [There is one sure way] of directly helping the Kingdom of God. That way is prayer. Social intercession may be the mightiest force in the world. [Holy Women, Holy Men, p. 32]

Vida Dutton Scudder reminds us of how easy it is to be self-centered, despite the best of intentions--how easily we assume that our vision is God's, that what we want for the world is what God wants. We forget that our faith calls us to a vision that fills us with wonder even as it empowers us. Our faith calls us not only to look for the light in every soul and in the darkest of circumstances, but to *be* that light, to be a *means* of grace – not the *source* of grace, empowered by a divine love more fierce than our righteous passion and more tender than our deepest longing.

Michael Fitzpatrick, <https://www.journeywithjesus.net> October 4 2020

So this is the first thing that faith can offer to the social justice warrior in her brave work. A gift of love to others out of response to perfect love is a game changer. To the person crushed under the weight of guilt for the brokenness they've caused in their lives or others, comes the Good News that the love of God in Jesus at the cross longs to forgive them and heal every broken thing. To the person alone and rejected because of their earthly identity, comes the Good News that all powers of this world are subject to the Jesus who is Lord, that the only identity that counts in the end is having Jesus say to you, "I know you." God is the fountain of love that flows through us into every life we touch.