Trust with all our hearts. That’s all. Whether the cost is giving up a slave, like Philemon, or hating parents and siblings as Jesus says in the gospel, the phrase “with all our hearts” sounds a lot like “no matter the cost.”

Jesus’ hyperbole—because he surely doesn’t mean that all of us have to hate all family members all the time, does he?—does set the bar impossibly high, even if one comes from a particularly hateful family. To make sure we get it, he tells his followers to hate their very lives. So that’s one stark, dismal way of saying that this is the cost of discipleship. I suppose that’s what we pray for in the Collect by saying, “God, help us trust in you with all our hearts.”

It still seems a strange, radical statement from the Lord of Life, that unless we hate our life we cannot follow him. Maybe, just maybe, what Jesus means by “your life” is what Moses means by “death” in the reading from Exodus. The kind of life that is grasping and rapacious and bows down to the gods of greed and self-centered power, that Moses, quoting God, calls death, is the kind of life that Jesus means by “your life” in this context. I don’t know, but I’m trying to make sense of it.

This is a difficult reading from Luke’s gospel, and I think I experience it as even more difficult in light of recent deaths I’ve mourned in the past month. Among those are at least six I’ve known and cared for personally: three in our own parish family. Three I’ve added today, two whom Cheri and I have known and loved since going to San Miguel de Allende 25 years ago, and one whom I knew primarily through his writings.

That last was Frederick Buechner. I actually did meet him, just, in a book-signing after his lecture at Wheaton College in 1985. Deana Geuther told me last Sunday of his death.

It’s Buechner I’d like to talk about for a moment, because his public life and writings exemplify what it means to offer one’s life for the sake of the gospel. Not in some heroic, battlefield feat, but in a heroically lived life of openness and shared faith.

Just Friday I read a remembrance of him by Michael Gerson, a columnist for the *Washington Post* and former top aide and speechwriter for President George W. Bush.

My impulse is to read you the entire article, but . . . relax . . . I won’t do that this time. I will quote (at some length) some excerpts from it.

Gerson begins with these words: When the late Frederick Buechner — novelist, preacher, Christian apologist — was asked to summarize the single essential insight of his prolific writing and speaking career, he would respond, “[Listen to your life](https://www.frederickbuechner.com/listening-to-your-life).”

The next quote from Buechner reveals what has always attracted me to his writing: “If indeed there is a God, which most of the time I believe there is . . .” There’s more to that sentence, and I’ll quote it for you in a minute, but not without pausing over “*most of the time* I believe there is.” Such words, such candor, are more than poetry to me, from one clergyman to this one. In these words are liberation and freedom in the confession of his occasional doubts. It means that perfect devotion, perfect trust, even, perfect *any*thing, is not a requirement for the person of faith.

Here’s the rest of the sentence: “and if indeed he [God] is concerned with the world, which the Christian faith is saying . . . one of the ways he speaks to us, and maybe one of the most powerful ways, is through what happens to us.”

Farther down in the article Buechner is quoted as saying, “Pay attention to moments” when “unexpected tears come to your eyes and what may trigger them.”

There is here, I believe, a real connection with that statement of, if not hating one’s life (still difficult for me to understand), not needing to pretty-up one’s life for the benefit of others. Said differently, not to try to convince God that one’s life is not exactly what it is.

Gerson goes on to say that Frederick Buechner not only paid attention to those moments in his life, he also freely shared them, unflinchingly, when such sharing could touch and heal the lives of others. Thus he encourage us, his readers, to exercise the same kind of openness with each other. Specifically, he mentions Buechner’s account of his father’s suicide when the author was a ten-year-old boy.

Gerson wrote this one sentence that shines like a beacon on the page, at least as far as I’m concerned: “More than anyone else in recent literary history, he showed how a modern person, schooled in skepticism, pursued by appropriate doubts, could find the frequency of grace, as if he were tuning an old radio.”

(Maybe repeat that.)

In closing, Gerson speaks of Buechner’s legacy and to the tension in which we live, trying to offer our entire lives to God in a world that pulls us in so many other directions. It also speaks to our hope for those whom we love and who have died:

“He understood that faith and doubt are not opposites but integral parts of the human journey. He knew that openness is ultimately a more important virtue than certainty. He presented, especially in his powerful novels, the mixture of sacred and profane at the heart of humanity, even at the heart of holiness. Now he rests, if there is any justice in the world, in the grace that pursued him for so long.”

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