

Tag! You're it!



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Since then I have found that coming before Jesus in repentance is a task I relish. I never know what surprises he will spring on me. I puzzled over the change in me, and came to the conclusion that in that time of play, I could be totally myself, not holding back, free to speak from the heart. There was a deep honesty about it that I couldn't accomplish without experiencing the intimacy of playing tag with Jesus. I saw that before this, I was playing a different game, the one that was centred on *me* and *my* justification, *my* work, *my* faith.

And he was right. Whether our times together involved play, or tears, or warfare, or deep honesty on my part, that honesty comes much more easily to me, now that I know Jesus better. I also know for sure that the 'me' that Jesus knows intimately is OK by him, even if it does require a bit of heart surgery at times.

Oh, and that list-as-long-as-your-arm?.....it seems to grow shorter by the day, now that I don't take myself so seriously.

I have never found repentance an easy thing (does anybody?). I mean, coming before an all-seeing, almighty God is no laughing matter (even though I love him - doesn't my turning to him prove that?), especially with a list of misdemeanours as long as your arm. Over time I convinced myself that, much like taking foul medicine, doing so showed that I was disciplined and serious about my spiritual life, and my quest for righteousness proved that.

For all that, I did feel lighter and far more justified after session with God, and stepped out with more strength to face the task of speaking him out to the world. So it became a matter of my knowing that I needed forgiveness, and dutifully crying out to him for mercy.

But it did seem that I was lurching from one spiritual crisis to another, one forgiveness and justification to another - much like the highs and lows of a mountain range, and the climbs after descents were wearing, to say the least. I told myself that even this stress was a sign of my dedication to God. I pushed away any thoughts of jaded faith by telling myself - and others - that all it took was faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That would carry me through. And if I did feel a failure, well.....my lack of faith was one of my besetting sins, to be trotted out during every session with God - forgiven for the time being, but still plaguing me.

And so it went on, until one day, having prepared myself for deep confession and repentance, having brought myself to God through Jesus in the usual contrite manner and revealed all (so I thought), the pronouncement of forgiveness took an unexpected turn. He tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Tag! You're it!"

"What?" I said, quite startled. "I mean.....er.....I beg your pardon?"

"You're it." he insisted.

"I don't understand." I said.

"I want you to play with me." he said.

"Play with you? What do you mean?"

"How can you get to know me if you don't play with me?"

"But I do know you.....insofar as its possible for me, a mere mortal, to know the awesome mystery of God."

"But mystery invites exploration. How can you get to know me if you don't explore our relationship?"

"But you're so holy, so....so....unknowable."

"That's just an excuse to keep me at arm's length. Tell me, do you remember your childhood friends, especially those you still call your friends?"

I thought back to my school days.

"So tell me about them. Did you get to know them in the classroom or in the playground? What did you do together?"

I thought about this, and had to admit that almost all my interaction with friends took place playing hopscotch or rounders. I remembered Imogen, who could skip rope better than anyone else in third grade - I admired her skill, and longed to be like her instead of having two left feet. Then there was Maisie, who shared her lunch with me, mainly because she didn't like apples and I didn't like bananas, so we would swap. I remembered so many others at school, how we would play on the swings, and how we would go to each other's houses for sleepovers and tell scary stories and laugh afterwards.

When I had finished telling him all this, he said, "Sounds like the playground is an ideal place to make friends and really get to know them."

I had to agree. "I suppose I did get to know them because we played together a lot." I said. "But isn't play a bit frivolous, given your....um....your holiness?"

"My 'holiness', as you put it, demands absolute, deep truth. Repentance must be deep, as forgiveness is deep. So trust between

us must be deep also. How can you trust me if you don't get to know me?

"But *you* already know *me* inside out. What can I bring you that you don't already have?"

"Yourself." he said.

"But I've given you myself - you remember - when I made my decision to let you into my life, and was born again."

"Your life with me is a learning curve. One decision does not make a lifetime's commitment. That has to be learnt as you go along. But all this takes trust - trust enough to look me in the eye and be brutally honest about your responsibility for your sins. And, as you said, most of that trust-learning takes place in the playground."

I thought about this. I couldn't quite get my brain around it, but I guessed that giving in to Jesus' 'playtime' might be the first step towards that trust - at least trusting what he'd just told me, even if I couldn't quite understand it all.

Then he said, "So, what about it?"

I said, "OK."

He grinned, whacked me on the arm and shouted, "You're it!" and ran.

And so we played tag, taking it in turns to be 'it', until we fell in an exhausted, laughing heap on the ground.

"You know," he said after he'd got his breath back, "it won't always be like this.... you and I. There'll be times when I will need you to weep with me, and times when we will have to stand shoulder to shoulder in warfare, and times when serious, heart searching discussion will be needed. But this.....this really warms my heart, to know that you have chosen to come closer to me and get to know me better."

This time I came away from confession feeling more than justified - I came away exhilarated!