

## Reflections on a Winter Internship with BCM

By Jacob Taylor

Thus the vocation of the baptized person is a simple thing: it is to live from day to day, whatever the day brings, in this extraordinary unity, in this reconciliation with all people and all things, in this knowledge that death has no more power, in this truth of the resurrection. It does not really matter exactly what a Christian does from day to day. What matters is that whatever one does is done in honor of one's own life, given to one by God and restored to one in Christ, and in honor of the life into which all humans and all things are called. The only thing that really matters is to live in Christ instead of death.

– William Stringfellow, *Instead of Death*

It's been a month since I finished my seven week internship with BCM. For as much time as I've had to reflect since then, I'm left with a lingering feeling that I could just as easily take another seven weeks somewhere quiet to digest everything I learned during my time there. My experience was rich and full to say the least, and it's proven difficult to transcribe it succinctly onto paper, or into conversations with friends and family who want to hear about my time. The metaphor of trying to put an ocean through an oil can funnel comes to mind. No doubt I'll hold the time in Oak View in my bones for many years to come, and continue to discover the harvest from some of the seeds planted this winter.

I came to BCM as a student with the set intention to continue my formation in Radical Discipleship alongside Ched and Elaine and their community in southern California. I spent a lot of hours in "Croatan West," the cabin on their yard, poring over scripture and watershed discipleship literature. And just as many hours chopping wood and tending to the vegetables and fruit trees, quietly reflecting on the material. Some of my favorite times were conversations about life, theology, and justice around the table with Ched and Elaine and the beautiful, brilliant folks that would occasionally come to share a meal with us. It's been a rich experience over the past few weeks just looking back through my notes and journal entries about conversations we had. I'm grateful for the connections I was able to make, and I'm excited to continue living into the values that BCM represents, specifically concerning issues of bioregionalism and embodied faith. (Right: Jacob circled, from group photo, 2016 Kinsler Institute.)



Still, beforehand I had, perhaps unconsciously, set aside those two months primarily for study and intellectual formation, relegating them to a sort of academic domain. However, probably the most important and formative lessons I've been left with have little to do with the material I was reading or headily discussing around the table. Through my developing friendship with Ched and Elaine, and wrestling with the emotionally demanding material covered at the February Kinsler Institute on trauma, I was confronted by a lot of long-neglected spiritual, emotional, and psychological needs in myself.

In the past I have suppressed or effectively sounded out these issues, thinking they should be superseded by tasks of pursuing a theological education or addressing myriad ecological/social/theological ills. With both a keen sense of urgency about those issues, and a

long-held skepticism (fueled mostly by a specific religious dogma) towards my own internal voice and intuition that might otherwise move me to confront those issues, I'd developed a rigidly held notion that the "personal" wasn't "political" enough to warrant my real, undivided attention. What's the use of self-care when the world is burning? Isn't it self-indulgent (and invariably an expression of privilege) to give so much attention to my personal melancholy while there's so much work to be done in the real world of oppression, war, and ecocide?

Maybe there's a legitimate question in there somewhere, but for me, these ideas were used to underpin what had essentially become a neglectful, borderline abusive relationship with myself. I wrote off the prospect of self-love as narcissism, and dismissed stewardship for my own mental/psychological/emotional health (what a concept!) as distracting self-indulgence. Even as I have divorced myself from much of the doctrinal content that fortifies the shame-driven faith system I inherited from some of the churches I've spent time in, I am coming to find that these rigid forms have stayed more intact than I would like to admit, and are triggered in insidious, not always obvious ways. No matter how spiritually in-tune I would perceive myself to be, my spirit ultimately grew malnourished and exhausted from a cycle of neglect, leaving me in the end incapable of giving my fullest attention and energy to the "external" work that captivated my attention.

I assumed that the Institute work on trauma would be peripheral for me, with most of my energy being geared towards continuing an education in the watershed discipleship material. While I did spend a lot of my time on the latter, perhaps the most valuable thing was having the space and permission to open myself to the healing work of the gospel in a substantial way at the Kinsler Institute, as well as in conversations with Ched and Elaine. I had some lucid moments with Ched at Casa Anna

Shulz, as he reiterated the centrality of the work of inner healing in the discipleship journey and helped me solidify a decision to pursue therapy to address my increasing sense of fragmentation. As I came up against my long-held subconscious resistance to such a decision (ultimately



that I'm not "worth" the time and financial resources it would require), he helped me articulate that for me, right now therapy and whatever else it takes to pursue healing *is* my discipleship. And in an economic and political culture that thrives on alienation from each other, the land, and ultimately in our own souls, self-care is also a legitimate expression of resistance. Intentionally pursuing healing is not selfish, because the world and the Beloved Community deserves the most integrated and actualized version of myself that I can give. And I deserve that, too.

It's strange to realize how all of the questions behind our efforts—emotional, political, or theological—converge in the most basic and foundational issues of faith: are we beloved and known by God? Is God trustworthy? Is the thrust behind history an immutable force of Love

that burns and refines and transforms even the hells we create? Our answers to questions about vocation, politics, partnership or whatever else are empty if we cannot answer those primary questions with a resounding Yes!—even in the midst of our pain and uncertainty. Not simply an intellectual affirmation, but an existential, embodied embrace that beckons a response every day when we wake up.

My time with BCM was a significant part of my learning to live into that answer more fully, and with more faith and conviction. As I continue on this path of discipleship, giving my life to bear witness to the wild, nonviolent love of God, I have also to extend that grace and devotion to stewardship of my own self. In order to bear witness to the transformative, restorative cosmology of the Kingdom, I must first give my own body and being to the work of God's reconciliation. It's a lifelong work of conversion, and I'm learning to love and trust the process. I'm thankful beyond words for my time at BCM, and for Ched and Elaine's warmth and hospitality as they invited me to be part of their family for a few months. I left a part of my heart with the Ventura River watershed and all its lovely inhabitants, and I hope our paths will cross again in the not-terribly-distant future. Thank you for everything.