Hawi Tilahun- Spiritual Growth

Social harmony is defined as the peaceful interaction of human dynamics among members of a social group or groups. This harmony must often be cared for and guarded with ultimate protection, even at the cost of individual pursuit. One must think twice before he or she thinks to commit actions that disturbs the norm of that social harmony. One thing I have come to realize, especially this fall semester of my sophomore year, is how much I am caught within this battle—the battle to please those around me for the sake of preserving this so called “harmony” and the battle to stand strong in my convictions, even if it will cost me reputation and growing pain for the moment. A class I am currently taking has suddenly conceptualized my conflicting battles, further challenging me to evaluate my walk with my lord and savior, Jesus Christ.

Coming to college, I was beyond excited to open a new chapter of my life. I felt life itself becoming more “real” as I began to be confronted with life-changing decisions. As a first generation college student in the United States, I was beginning to see my dreams unfold before me; my parents, my family both here and in Ethiopia, cheering me on because my victory was going to be their victory; deep inside, I also knew my failures were going to be their failures. I came to college carrying the imbedded voices of my father and mother who have sacrificed their lives so that I could have a better life that is not only self-sustaining, but life-giving to others."Seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness and everything else would be added on to you," my mom would advice me. Her echo of Mathews 6:33 to keep my Lord first became my anchor and comfort in all circumstances and when Christ remained a priority in my life, everything seemed to fall into place. I saw that he blessed the things I loved less when I love him first.

I embarked on the journey of college with excitement yet with multitude of questions and deep-rooted fears. "What if I fail you God?" I would ponder to myself. I feared my own ignorance and inability to explain my faith in such a way tangible and relatable. I feared hypocrisy—saying one thing and acting another way. I feared being perceived as judgmental or prideful and above all, I feared showing love that lacked genuineness and honesty. My fears, never articulated, remained between me and God but little did I know that my decision to come to Macalester College would place me head-on with those fears.

In my freshman year, Macalester campus so graciously provided the platform in which my faith will be tested and strengthened. Often, these opportunities of growth were ones I didn’t choose and other times, they were the results of my own decisions. In meeting my roommate who I would be living with for the following year, I was anxious about the dynamics of our relationship and friendship. Questions from would she like chicken as much I do to what is her spiritual belief boggled my mind. In the course of our friendship, I have been challenged to not only evaluate my beliefs, but also articulate why I believe what I believe. I began to see questions as gateways to growth that will draw me deeper to know the heart of God. In conversations with a particular friend who always had her share of curiosities, I became fairly acquainted with the phrase…”I don’t know.” Yet, my “I don’t knows” continue to lead me on my knees in seeking wisdom and greater understanding. My “I don’t knows” lead me to ponder, “am I suppose to know everything?” and if I did, “what’s the point of faith” My “I don’t knows” made
me question—would I be found faithful in bearing the answers with maturity? Even now, I am developing a love for “I don’t knows” because they humble me to realize the greatness and mystery of the God I serve and his utility of such questions to draw me deeper in HIM.

And on the occasions when my “I don’t knows,” are answered, I am challenged daily with the task of obedience—obedience that I know will often come with a cost. There are many instances during classroom discussions or even casual conversations when I realize my hesitancy to say what I believe for the fear of looking “religious.” Instances when I hear friends casually use the name of “Jesus” as a curse word or as an expression of their anger at a situation. Everything inside me screams, “That name is so precious to me. Please don’t devalue it.” Times when I don’t think we should dismiss certain things for the sake of cultural relativism to appease the demands of society. So here on this beautiful campus, I battle with these internal conflicts yet feel the overwhelming urge to not only listen, but speak my mind with love and gentleness.

Being involved in the Macalester Christian fellowship, I am surrounded with amazing people whose testimonies lift me up and also make me treasure my own story in my walk with the Lord. I look forward with such enthusiasm to the times I would have with my prayer partner. Part of growth is intentionally choosing to grow with people that want to grow. Having a prayer partner willing to share her life, her joys, her frustrations, and her dreams challenged me to come out of my own comfort zone and in doing so, take the chance in trusting and being entrusted with another life. Such is the experience I was able to gain by being on Macalester College.

As you all know, this was the weekend Macalester hosted the International Roundtable dealing with promoting equity within and across borders. As my peers led their workshops and speakers presented their work in tackling certain issues related to health, there were countless moments of inspiration for me. The fact that Macalester hosts such events not only brings me to think globally, it further stirs and reinforces the dreams that God had originally placed on my heart. The education I gained and continue to gain gives me the academic foundation I need and makes me think even more the ways my faith and academic life compliment one another; it cultivates my empathy and desire to serve the world I live in with greater understanding and awareness.

It has been quiet the journey. Reflecting upon my own experiences since being here at Macalester College, I am filled with gratitude for the challenges I have faced. Each new day, I gain the strength to remain true to my own beliefs not only by my own strength but by the grace of Christ. And despite my desire to sustain social harmony around me, this grace often calls me to gently disturb it. The process of growth and transformation is inseparable with pain. Macalester has helped me embrace this truth and it continues to provide me the platform that cultivates my spiritual, emotional, and academic growth.