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Kolozsvár Blues

Matthew 4, 8-10

⁸ Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

⁹ And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

¹⁰ Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

I'm hearing the drumming of a shaman's drum, the drum beats of an invitation to an imaginary journey. Let us travel first to Haromszek, and peak our heads into a kitchen in this quiet village. We see a tired, weary-eyed mother who is shucking corn next to the crackling fire in the fireplace. We hear her as she talks out loud to her husband: "Well, Pops, one more month, and our kiddo is coming home." Even without a response she continues: "Home from that distant, strange land."

Then, let us journey to a snow-covered landscape complete with winding railroad tracks somewhere along the river Maros, and when the 4:30 train sounds its whistle, a grandma dressed in black headscarf presses her palms together saying "Oh God, please look after our granddaughter, the apple of our eyes."

And then let us travel to Erdovidek, and listen in on a conversation at dusk on a village street. "So, where is your son, nowadays?" The answer comes in a somewhat gloomy, and somewhat proud tone: "He is up in Kolozsvár; he is studying at the University." And what about your daughter?" "She is up there as well, in the Unitarian College."

Did you catch that? They are up there. Oh yes, she is up there; I'm up there, we are all up there. And all that is entirely true. We are all up there, because, and you have to trust me on this as I explain it later, Kolozsvár is very much like a mountain. It's like a mountain that, for many of us, comes into view suddenly, out of the blue. Kolozsvár is like a mountain, because meandering foot paths lead to it from every possible direction.

Kolozsvar is like a mountain, because from here you can see far-far away, and from this mountain you can yell that, as the poet Aprily put it, “primal yell” of accomplishment. Kolozsvar is like a mountain you may trek through to explore. This is a sacred place to retreat to when you want to find your true self, or when your soul is thirsting to connect with God. Kolozsvar is a mountain that some considers the ivory tower of knowledge; some considers it the location for the highest quality of life, and for some this mountain appears as a steep climb into adulthood.

Kolozsvar is the Mount Olympus for Hungarian students; it’s a place where they are given 4, 5, 8, 12 years to play this heartfelt, soulful blues we call life.

So, just who do you think you are, yes, you, mere mortal; you who grabbed your hand-woven shoulder bag, and journeyed here from your hometown to conquer this mountain? What sort of winds may have nudged you in the back along your journey; what sort of desires motivated you? What sort of inner voices may have been commanding you, just for the sake of those few years when you could call yourself a “student at Kolozsvar”?

You say you brought with you the scent of the pine forest, the fizz of the sparkling mineral springs, you brought your delightful dialect, and maybe a pen knife. You say you brought your imprintable soul, your clever mind, your willpower, your quiet determination to absorb through 4 or 5 years here all that will be useful for the rest of your life.

The Hobo Blues Band sings:

“We’ve been down for so so long
We didn’t know what it feels like being up
We’ve been down for so so long
We didn’t know what it feels like being up”

We can extend that lyrics to our local conditions:

We didn’t know that this town knows only three colors,
We didn’t know what Sunday is like without our mothers’ chicken soup,
We didn’t know that it’s a treat being offered a Sora sandwich,
We didn’t know we have to shut up on Monostor,
We didn’t know what it’s like feeling homesick, toiling hard at the grindstone, or feeling like a stranger.

We also learned that:

The Hungarian you don't speak is the Kolozsvár blues,
When your landlady nags you is the Kolozsvár blues,
When your empty pocket rules is the Kolozsvár blues,
When you hide like a stranger is the Kolozsvár blues.

My dear friends, You all know it well that this town can be a place of temptation. You may chose to spend the next 5 years by putting on a intellectual poker face blowing smoke in a café. You all know it well that you can buy dope behind the "Obszi" observatory, as that's the chic now. You all know it well that you may chose to exist for the next 5 years by laying low, and muddling through this Bermuda triangle of Krajczár, Klausen and Bulgakov.

However, my brothers and sisters, you may chose another way of life, mind you. You can lead another way of life, because there yet exists another Kolozsvár! There yet exists a Kolozsvár where the sound of the music is still pure, where the handshake is welcoming, and the girls have an easy smile. There yet exists a Kolozsvár that is all that you dreamed about, a Kolozsvár where the city is still ours.

I'm from Kolozsvár. I belong among those who on Sunday afternoon walks on Main Square, not on Matty's Square. We hurry about our chores on Jokai Street, and not on Napoca. We take our dates to Miko Park, not to the Hasdeu. We attended school on Kossuth Lajos Street, and we didn't just "compost our class notes". We row our boats on Setater, and not in Nagypark. And on Pata Street we greet in Hungarian Mr. Daut, the Turkish confectioner. We read the humor-filled articles of Bajor Andras in the Igazsag magazine. We applaud the shows of Bako Gyorgy and Szabo Gyuszi. We can point out the oldest tombstones in Hazsongard cemetery.

If you ever listened to the deep sounds of the bells of St Michael's church, if you ever walked on Setater while kicking the buckeyes, if you ever lit a candle on the graves of Szisz, Dzsida or Brassai, you understand plenty of what I'm talking about.

Szasz Ferenc, the poet wrote:

"Salvations somber creation

Busts lined up in the hall

Then Berde Morzsa, that prankster,

The wink of his eyes tell me that yes,

Reverence in Kolozsvár is still from Berde and Brassai"

So, let it be known that this town was the midwife to our religion. You must accept that this is still the town of Heltai Gaspar, Kovary, Pakei, Kelemen Lajos and Miko Imre, and I dare say that you are guaranteed to experience their spiritual presence. Rest assured, besides you, there are other delirious lunatics who year after year chose that way of life.

They carry within them the craving for unceasing exploration exemplified by David Ferenc, and the desire to learn and comprehend like Boloni Farkas Sandor. They learned to be disciplined from Erdo Janos. They learned to be stubborn from Szabo Dezso. Those ancestors of our faith call themselves unitarians, and that's a hard-earned compliment. For them Kolozsvár was a place of revelations about God and revelations about themselves. It was within these walls where they absorbed the spirit of freedom, and they would approvingly smile upon hearing the Hobo Blues Band song:

“This has nothing to do with money, or power
Or knowledge; Judas, you don't seem to get it,
This is something different altogether.”

That particular “something different” is what brought us here to gather on this mountain. That “something different” is our unshakable belief in the providence of God, our personal dedication to put the teachings of Jesus into everyday practice, to reflect the directness of the humanity of Jesus and the experience of the merciful nature of the Holy Spirit, the morality derived from conscience and intellect, the experience of free will, and the practical applications of God's love. Those make up that “something different”; those make this town into a mountain; those make Kolozsvár into our home.

Let us reference again Matthew 4, 8-10

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Imagine the raised hand of Jesus as he commands: “Get thee hence Satan”.

This is our purpose of being here; all of us have been transformed because of it. As you look around, observe that we all play in the same blues band,

and jam together this sometimes sad, sometimes tormenting, sometimes unbelievably joyful, beautiful blues.

So, come my brothers and sisters, come up to this ivory tower. Then look down at that dirty, smelly, treasured city. Move your gaze from church bell tower to bell tower, from street to street, and observe this building. If at any time you feel lost, if even shadows scare you, if you are getting lonely, return to this building. You find friends here, friends with open hearts, friends who mean you well, friends who are free thinkers, friends who still have faith that in the hills of Felek near Kolozsvar, the Providence of God has not been extinguished.

Keep returning to this place; have a seat and whether you put your palms together or pick up a musical instrument, let us play together the best we can, while remembering our loved ones we left behind, this all so sweet blues of our lives, the blues of our salvation, this Kolozsvar blues.

Amen