Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Beginnings – Week 1

The presumption of "Beginnings" is that you are an atheist, agnostic, or person desiring a refresher of the basics of faith. You are encouraged to gather with interested people daily to reflect together. For many people daily conversations are impractical, so at minimum meet weekly to go over the past week of reflections. In your conversations, include your struggles and your difficulties approaching the subject matter as well as what you agree with. **Please note your conversations should be kept confidential within the group unless you give explicit permission for something to be shared.** Welcome!

Day 1 Do I believe?

I'm not sure I believe in God. That's ok. *In fact, I don't think I believe in God.* No problem. Maybe think of the situation this way: You can go through your entire life believing in God and trying to live how you think God wants you to, even thinking you have ongoing conversations with God, and then die – and find out that's the end. What have you lost? *A life mis-spent?* How have you mis-spent it? You've given it meaning and purpose, direction. Hopefully you've achieved some things which have given you joy. Hopefully you've made the world better in the meantime. What really have you lost? *All the crazy wonderful things I could have done if I didn't believe in God?* Like what? Truly, if you believe in the God that I know, the crazy things you would have done wouldn't have been wonderful – they would have been terrible, and destructive. *So, what if I go through life NOT believing in God?* That's a good question. You could go through all of life, not believing in God, and find out – there is no God. Everything is indeed meaningless. We are just atoms, pieces of dust, so to speak. *Rather dismal.* Rather! Or you could go through all of life, not believing in God, and find out after you die – there IS a God. Your life could have had great meaning and purpose – and you either: a.) 'lucked out' and did things God liked, so you are ok, or b.) had a meaningless life of no consequence which you totally wasted, and God is rather disappointed in you, or c.) had a life which went against God's desires and purposes, so now you have to take the consequences. *What?* Yes – what if there are consequences regarding the life we lead?

Write down your thoughts here: Do you believe in God? Why or why not? If not, do you think there could be consequences if you are wrong? If you would like to explore in more detail the idea presented here, look up "Pascal's Wager."

Find a group of people that you can share with and build trust, and meet at least weekly (if not daily) and join in this pilgrimage with them. Share some of your thoughts with these people.

Day 2 Foundational Document

You are in the Image of God. "*What? I don't think I believe in God yet!"* No? "*In fact, what if I'm certain I don't believe in God?"* Regardless of whether you believe or not, you are in the Image of God. 'Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness, so they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move on the earth." God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.' *"Where did that come from?"* There is a book which Christians use called the Bible, which is foundational documentation of what they believe. When you see something in red, that's something brought in from the Bible. This part is from near the beginning. "*I don't have a foundational document – I believe whatever I want – no book is going to tell me what to believe."* Do you believe in evolution? *Yes.* Me too. In that case, your foundational document is On the Origin of Species, by Charles Darwin. *What?* Do you believe the earth rotates around the sun? "*Yes.".* In that case, your foundational document is Six Books Concerning the Revolutions of the Heavenly Orbs, by Nicolaus Copernicus. A foundational document records what people adopt as a way of looking at the world, or paradigm, which is foundational for how they approach life. "*Ah… I think I understand you."* Since this study is a life-discipline on Anglican Christianity, I'll be using foundational documents for Anglican Christians, chief of which is the Bible.

Write down your thoughts: What are other foundational documents you are aware of? These may be things you use to guide you in any way.

Now, share your thoughts with some people you trust.

Day 3 Image

'Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness, so they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move on the earth." God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.'

How can I be the Image of something which I don't even believe in? Ah! Excellent question. When you look at a painting of someone, what do you see? *The author's representation of that person.* Exactly. Does the painting believe in, or even know of, the person that it is a painting of? *No, but this is silly – a painting is not capable of thought.* True – but do you grant that, even if it was capable of thought, a painting could exist of someone, say of Julius Caesar, and that painting could be a very accurate representation without any personal knowledge or connection to Julius Caesar? *Ummm…. I suppose so.* Thank you. The painting will represent whatever the artist desires the painting to represent, (subject to the ability of the artist), you agree? *Yes, that makes sense.* It's not up to the painting, or the sculpture, or whatever it is as to what it represents? *Yes, that still makes sense.* Good. In the same way, you can represent God without knowing anything at all about God, if you have been created as a representation of God. *Ok, I don't believe this, but I follow your logic.* Well, very near the beginning of the Bible we are told that all humans, across the entire world, regardless of if they know of God or not, are made in the Image, or Likeness, (or "representation of") of God. That as representatives (or Images) of God, they get to decide the fates of all the other creatures. *What?* It's true, isn't it? Humanity decides the fates of all the other creatures on the planet? Look at how the earth's temperature is warming up – what one species can actually do something about it? What one species can decide to bulldoze down a forest or create a lake? What one species can raise millions of other animals for food? *Humanity.* Yup.

Write down your thoughts: How does Humanity rule the world as a collective species?

Now, share your thoughts with some people you trust.

Day 4: Representation

So let me get this straight. You're saying that I am in the Image of God. That's correct, yes. *How am I in the Image of God???* Well, can you create things? Can you take some clay and make a bowl or a plate perhaps? Or can you make music? Sing a song? Draw, or colour? *I can do a little bit of some of that, yes.* So you are a Creator – in the same way that God is. *But I can't create the entire universe.* True – while you may create a fictional universe in your mind and write it down for others to enjoy, you can't create the real universe – you are in the IMAGE of God, not God – just like a picture is an Image of the person, not the person itself. *I see… so when 'creation' sees me, it sees an Image of God?* Yes. *So God has two eyes, one nose and one mouth?* A physical image is too limiting. *Eh?* A physical image is too limiting. God created everything, just like you can create anything your mind dreams up. We are like God in that. Outside of the physical, what other attributes do you have? *I have emotions.* Yes, God has those. *I have intelligence.* Exactly! Each of your attributes are an Image, on a small scale perhaps, of what God is like. *So God is like me?* Well, you are like God.

Write down your thoughts: What are all your attributes? If each of those is a representation of what God has (for example, we have intelligence, God has unlimited intelligence; we have emotions of A, B, C, God has …, we have strength, we have locality and yet may move, we have …), what may God be like?

Now, share your thoughts with some people you trust.

Day 5: Goodness

God said, "Let there be light." And there was light! God saw that the light was good … God called the dry ground "land" and the gathered waters he called "seas." God saw that it was good … The land produced vegetation—plants yielding seeds according to their kinds, and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. God saw that it was good … God made two great lights—the greater light to rule over the day and the lesser light to rule over the night. He made the stars also. … God saw that it was good… God created the great sea creatures and every living and moving thing with which the water swarmed, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. God saw that it was good… God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the cattle according to their kinds, and all the creatures that creep along the ground according to their kinds. God saw that it was good… God created humankind in His own image … God saw all that he had made—and it was very good!

Creation is good. Life is good. It all comes from a God who likes 'good.' *Hold on, I've got you now – if life is so good, why is there so much rotten in the world?* Like what? *Like war. Like starvation. Like disease. Like death. Like mosquitoes! Like people getting hurt, even hurting each other.* Ah. Very important questions. First of all, what is 'good'? *Ummm… Good is what we desire – what we want – what is best in the circumstance.* That's a good definition. From that definition, in God's eyes, creation is 'good'. *But what about all the bad? The stuff we don't want?* Indeed, let's talk about that. Before we do, though, I'd like to introduce the concept of *shalom.* Shalom is a Hebrew word meaning *peace*, *harmony*, *wholeness*, *completeness*, *prosperity*, *wellness,* and *tranquility.* Shalom can be thought of as a right relationship with God, with yourself, with others, and with all of creation. It's the way God intended things to be when He first created us. Though it's often translated as 'peace', shalom is much more than the English word 'peace'.

Write down your thoughts: What is goodness? What about the world is good? What is not? What about yourself is good? What is not? Is there a fuller statement of goodness than 'shalom'? How would you describe an ultimate state of goodness?

Now, share your thoughts with some people you trust.

Day 6: Trouble

You are in the Image of God. *So you tell me.* And God intended you to live in a state of Shalom. *Peace, harmony, wholeness, completeness,* Yup. *That was rude – you didn't let me finish.* You're right, and I'm glad you get it – but I want to us to move onto an important point. *What point?* You are in the Image of God, and God intended (and intends) for you to live in a state of shalom. *I heard you.* So? *So?* So, why aren't you? Why aren't I? Why isn't all of humanity? *Because you're speaking a pipedream and this isn't real?* You're upset. I apologize for being rude, but that is part of my point. *Really?* Yes, really – rudeness, where I insisted on my way over yours and took away some of your freedom (in this case, freedom to finish your sentence to me), could be thought as a mild symptom of the lack of shalom. We are in the Image of God, intended to live in a state of complete wholeness and health, yet we don't – as you pointed out before, there is a lot which is rotten in the world. Why? Why, if you are the Image of God, and God intended you to live in a state of shalom, is there so much rotten with the world? *Because God didn't make it right?* Could be. Or… *Or … we aren't really in the Image of God?* Well, not quite. The Bible teaches us that though people are created as Image of God, and as we saw we can discern what God is like by seeing what we are like, we rebel against being Image of God. *We rebel in order to do what?* To be our own god. To have our own way. To determine our own destiny. *Those are good things, aren't they?* Not really – they come from selfishness and lead to conflict and to harm, such as insisting on my way to the detriment of your way.

Write down your thoughts: Is it good to have your own way? When might it be, and when might it not be? Is it good to determine your own destiny? Again, when might it be, and when might it not be?

Now, share your thoughts with some people you trust.

Day 7: Rest

Hebrews 4:10 For the one who enters God's rest has also rested from his works, just as God did from his own works (Genesis 2:2-3: By the seventh day God finished the work that he had been doing, and he ceased on the seventh day all the work that he had been doing. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it he ceased all the work that he had been doing in creation.).

On the seventh day, God rested – and so should we. Today, reflect on the past week and care for your needs (body and spirit).

In the evening get together with a group you trust and share what you would like to from the previous week – good points, hard points, what you've learned, what you've struggled with, etc.