Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Week 71: The Kingdom of God: healing, relationships, trust, acceptance … sacrifice?

Day 490: That's not fair!

"The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the workers for the standard wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When it was about nine o'clock in the morning, he went out again and saw others standing around in the marketplace without work. He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too, and I will give you whatever is right.' So they went. When he went out again about noon and three o'clock that afternoon, he did the same thing. And about five o'clock that afternoon he went out and found others standing around, and said to them, 'Why are you standing here all day without work?' They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You go and work in the vineyard too.'

When it was evening the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages starting with the last hired until the first.' When those hired about five o'clock came, each received a full day's pay. And when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more. But each one also received the standard wage.

When they received it, they began to complain against the landowner, saying, 'These last fellows worked one hour, and you have made them equal to us who bore the hardship and burning heat of the day.' And the landowner replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am not treating you unfairly. Didn't you agree with me to work for the standard wage? Take what is yours and go. I want to give to this last man the same as I gave to you. Am I not permitted to do what I want with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

So the last will be first, and the first last." (Matthew 20:1-16)

Everyone should get the same opportunity. Everyone should get the same result. Everyone should get the same treatment, identically.

Yet we are told (Exodus 20:17, Deuteronomy 5:21), "do not covet what you neighbour is getting."

In the kingdom of God, not everyone is treated the same – Peter, John, and James were part of Jesus' inner circle, and Jesus treated each of them differently. The twelve formed another circle. Then there was a circle beyond them.

Sometimes, people get the same results despite "deserving" less. Sometimes, people get results they have not "earned". Yet God asks, 'are you envious because I am generous?'

God gives us life and all its blessings not because we deserve or have earned them – He gives to us because He loves us. If we get differently than others, it does not mean He loves us less or more – just that everyone is on their own adventure, and God gives to each individually. We can trust God. It does not help to compare what we have with others. Those who are last can rejoice for those who are first, and vice-versa – for we all have a place in God's kingdom.

You have a place in God's kingdom. You may be rich or poor, you may be especially gifted or not, you may find life easy or hard, you may be first or last – regardless, you have a place in God's kingdom. God wants to live with you for eternity, experiencing life through your eyes, your hands, your thoughts and feelings.

Are there things you are envious of, which you should give to God and let go of?

Share your thoughts with those you trust.

Day 491: Crucifixion … and Resurrection.

As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve aside privately and said to them on the way, "Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the experts in the law. They will condemn him to death, and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged severely and crucified. Yet on the third day, He will be raised." (Matthew 20:17-19)

We covered crucifixion on Day 109 (Week 16).

No wonder the disciples neither understood nor believed what Jesus was saying – that God's Messiah, the triumphant King, should undergo such treatment was unthinkable.

Yet on the third day, He will be raised. This was such a foreign idea, that God would raise one person in the middle of history – how could they understand?

There is much in our future we do not understand nor can predict. Yet we are reassured that whatever happens, we are to be brave in our trust of God, and love each other. Doing so, we walk with Christ, and will join Him in His resurrection kingdom – even we, who were born ~2,000 years after those first disciples, shall be included in. Any pain which we might feel in the current world will pale when compared to the life we shall live with God for eternity.

How does this make you feel?

Day 492: Ambition

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling down she asked him for a favor. He said to her, "What do you want?" She replied, "Permit these two sons of mine to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom."

Jesus answered, "You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink the cup I am about to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." He told them, "You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right and at my left is not mine to give. Rather, it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father."

Now when the other 10 heard this, they were angry with the two brothers. But Jesus called them and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions use their authority over them. It must not be this way among you! Instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."
(Matthew 20:20-28)

Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, your slave.

Jesus taught, Jesus confronted, Jesus led. And Jesus served. Jesus was strong and stubborn, single-minded, forgiving, gracious, demanding, and most of all, loving. Jesus served. We are not called to be milquetoast; we are not called to be doormats – anything but. However, we are called to serve.

We are called to serve with strength, with devotion, with courage, with trust, with love.

Our ambition is not to be for ourselves, but for God, for Christ. Pursue the will of Christ, and have the adventure of your lives – that is the promise. Not riches in any earthly manner – in fact, probably, poverty in the world's eyes – but great riches of love in the eyes of our Lord.

What are you ambitious for?

Share your thoughts with those you love.

Day 493: Healing

As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed them. Two blind men were sitting by the road. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they shouted, "Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!" The crowd scolded them to get them to be quiet. But they shouted even more loudly, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" Jesus stopped, called them, and said, "What do you want me to do for you?" They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened." Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him. (Matthew 20:29-34)

Through all the rising tension, Jesus continued to do the baseline of His calling: healing. He tangibly demonstrated the Kingdom of God at every opportunity. But note how He did it.

By touching their eyes?

In this case, yes – but more generically, look at the process Jesus followed. Once they had Jesus' attention, what did He do?

Asked them what they wanted?

Yes. Always let the person have their respect, their dignity. As much as possible, give them ownership. The blind men were calling out, "Mercy on us Lord! Son of David!" Jesus did not just act – first, He asked. Healing doesn't happen just physically, but also relationally, socially, psychologically. Jesus empowered the blind men to influence their future – and then He acted according to God's desire, with compassion. Healing is part of your calling, as well.

Do you empower those you meet? True servanthood does not take away nor impose power, but grants it. This does not mean minimizing your own strength, or serving something contrary to God's desire – it means increasing others' capabilities to enter shalom and serve God, while maintaining your own, and using the combined strength towards what is healthiest, what is most loving, most glorifying of God. Always act according to God's desire, nurturing yourself and your fellow Images of God.

How does this change your approach to yourself and others?

Share your thoughts with your fellow explorers.

Day 494: Adoration

Now when they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, telling them, "Go to the village ahead of you. Right away you will find a donkey tied there, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you are to say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once."

This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet:
"Tell the people of Zion, 'Look, your king is coming to you, unassuming and seated on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'" (Zechariah 9:9)

So the disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road. Others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those following kept shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" As He entered Jerusalem the whole city was thrown into an uproar, saying, "Who is this?" And the crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee."
(Matthew 21:1-11)

When you read the Old Testament, two apparently contradictory visions take form:

a.) the triumphant introduction of the kingdom of God, through which the people of Israel shall rule the world; and
b.) the introduction of a suffering servant who will humbly walk with God and be the saviour of God's people through sacrifice of themselves.

As we heard on Day 491, the disciples (and more broadly speaking, the people of Israel) were looking forward to the culmination of the first vision, with themselves as fellow-rulers with Christ. However, as also shown on that day, Christ identifies with the second vision as well.

The key to understand is that the first vision comes about not through force or evil, but through the realization of the second vision. It is by suffering, by serving, by healing that God's kingdom is introduced and realized – and once realized, the world shall be guided not by rulers or by force, but by love and servanthood. The people of Israel "rule" the world precisely by loving it and *refusing* to rule it.

Every person shall have their dignity and integrity, every person shall own their actions, every person shall have their own house and their own vineyard. People shall not take advantage of each other but encourage and empower each other. That is living in shalom.

People have heard Jesus teach, have witnessed Jesus heal, and now see Him coming unassuming and seated on the humble foal of a donkey.

The King has arrived. Those who have eyes to see, let them exult.

Share your thoughts regarding the two visions.

What vision are you pursuing?

Share your thoughts and questions with your fellow explorers.

Day 495: Confrontation

Then Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all those who were selling and buying in the temple courts and turned over the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves. And he said to them, "It is written, 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are turning it into a den of robbers!"

The blind and lame came to him in the temple courts, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the experts in the law saw the wonderful things he did and heard the children crying out in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant and said to him, "Do you hear what they are saying?" Jesus said to them, "Yes. Have you never read, 'Out of the mouths of children and nursing infants you have prepared praise for yourself'?" And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and spent the night there.
(Matthew 21:12-17)

Without the money changers and the sellers of animals, the sacrifices would stop – and without the sacrifices, the Israelites could not find atonement with God. What was Jesus doing???

First, He was labelling the present sacrificial system as wanting: it had become not prayer, but rather a system of extortion and a way of separating the people from God, not bringing them closer together.

Second, Jesus was telling those in charge that He was putting an end to their practices (as per Psalm 8:2, "From the mouths of children and nursing babies you have ordained praise on account of your adversaries, so that you might put an end to the vindictive enemy").

He was going to put an end to the vindictive enemy.

Third, the authorities were indignant because the children were calling out that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah – and His answer confirmed their accusation.

The rising tension was getting unbearable.

Jesus sacrificed Himself for us and for the world – we are not Him. As His disciples though, we are called to His path – a path of honesty, of love, sometimes of confrontation, and sometimes of sacrifice. Jesus insisted on following the path His Father had created for Him – and we are called to follow the path which Jesus creates for us. Jesus is the Messiah, He has removed the teeth of the vindictive enemy, and He is intent on bringing people close to God – in fact, into communion with God.

Ask Jesus for guidance when you are in conflict or having hard conversations. He may lead you down some surprising paths.

Explain your thoughts to your fellow explorers.

Day 496: Rest

Rest, receive nourishment, feed both body and soul. Reflect on the past week and care for your needs (body and spirit). Pray. Dedicate this day to God. Worship! Fill yourself with Light. 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. Decide again if you wish to continue journeying together or want to stop.

Know that God loves you. Celebrate, Rejoice, Give thanks, talk and walk with God. Be in shalom.