Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Responsibility, Connection, Love, – and Hypocrites – Week 17

Maybe God wants us to change how we live.

Day 113: Responsibility

So to summarize, Jesus loved (and loves) us so much that He gave up His life for us, accepting one of the most degrading and painful method of execution that humanity could submit Him to – and in response, we give our lives to Jesus, committing everything we have and all that we are to Him – that is the meaning of the altar and the cross.

I understand you telling me that Jesus loved deeply, even to the point of sacrificing himself. I understand that you think emphasizing connection to Him is important, so important that the very building you gather in is built to emphasize it. I'm not in that place, however. Though I don't recognize anything supernatural, I don't feel disconnected. I have family and friends who love me. I do meaningful work. I'll have a legacy, in my family and in whatever the ripple effects of my actions are going forward. I'm not feeling empty, or meaningless – in fact, I feel empowered to be who and what I wish to be.

You are fixed in one set of reality, and I am in another. I have a question for you:

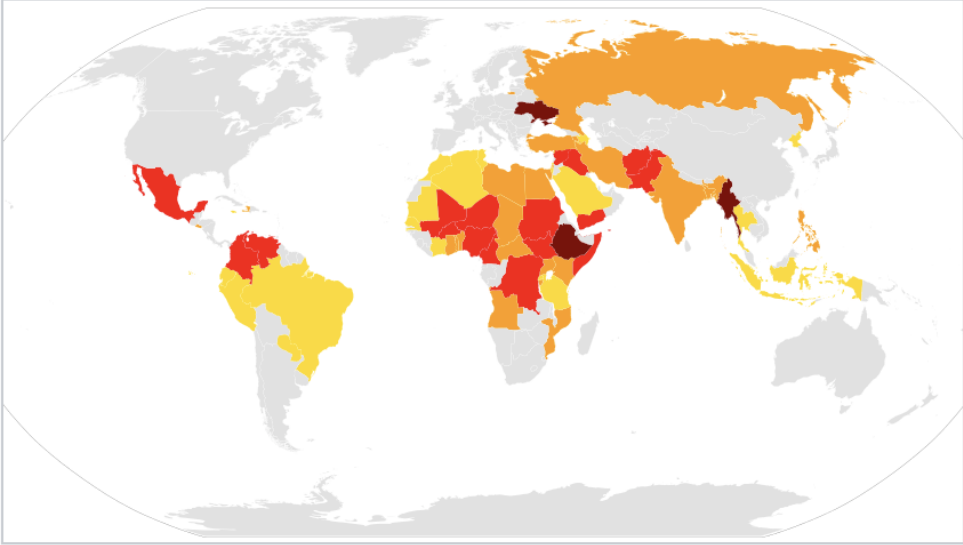
Are you happy with how the world is?

In some aspects yes, in many aspects no. However, I take action as I see fit – I do not own what I cannot influence, but try to influence what I desire to.

I suggest that reality is bigger than just "me." I agree that our actions have impacts far beyond ourselves. Each of us is responsible for the lostness which impelled Putin to order Russia to invade Ukraine. Each of us is responsible for deforestation of the jungle in Brazil. Each of us is responsible for any act of cruelty, violence, vindictiveness, vengeance. Each of us is responsible for any act of jealousy, hatred, murder, rape. Each of us is responsible for it all.

How can you have such arrogance as to say you are responsible for all that? How can you have such blind pride?

The line between good and evil runs through us all. We are responsible for it because we are fallen – we cannot condemn anyone who acts in hatred, violence, etc., because we contain all of that within us. I am not saying we did those things – they are specific actions done by specific people. However, without the guidance and connection with God, history proves that we turn to depravity and evil – which the stories that we began our study with, Adam and Eve, etc., illustrate so well. Below is a map of conflicts in the world – which does not include all the mass shootings in the USA, the Uighur repression in China, and other "civil disturbances" — it is a map of combat-related deaths only. It shows over half the world involved in combat (source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ongoing_armed_conflicts).



Map of ongoing armed conflicts (number of combat-related deaths in current or past year):

- Major wars (10,000 or more)
- Wars (1,000–9,999)
- Minor conflicts (100–999)
- Skirmishes and clashes (1–99)

Do you truly think you are different from the people living in those countries?

Humanity is responsible for all the evil in the world. Yes, there may be spiritual forces and circumstances which from time to time encourage evil, but humans have choices. When we do evil to another, we are walking apart from God. And the world will not change, WE will not change, apart from God. The only way for the world to change is to decide not to be 'masters of our own fate', but let God truly be our master. If we let God be our master, we honestly bring to God the times where we have fallen short of God's desires – and we find forgiveness. This isn't a get-out-of-jail-free card, but God's reconciling act towards us through the Christ, Jesus of Nazareth.

How are you responsible for the evil in the world?

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

Day 114: Connection.

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So now you say I am responsible for it all?

Something to think about it. Perhaps it would help to do some reflective reading – if you'd like something different than the bible, perhaps you would like to read The Gulag Archipelago by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, or a novel by Fyodor Dostoevsky. We are our brother's keeper. We are all in connection with each other. Of course, the bible is a great resource for this kind of reading as well.

Jesus emphasized this responsibility. The way to health is to love not just yourself, but others. To love even those you don't like. To love even those who will kill you. We are all connected. The sacrifice of Christ was to save everyone not through a political or economic program, definitely not through a military program, but through a program of connecting each person to God. Through this connection, we are saved from ourselves and brought into a new society – one of love. It is all about love – and Christ is the way. You are loved, we are all loved – and we all bear responsibility for how we live together. In living together with God through Christ, we can come to Him acknowledging our failure as a species to truly care for each other. Come to Him with heartfelt sorrow – and receive forgiveness with the guidance of how to live in love.

Jesus is calling to you right now, whether you have already done this or not, to renew and deepen your relationship with Him, to be one with Him, to join with Him in His dangerous and exhilarating life of love. He calls to all of us ongoing to walk ever deeper in this life with Him. This is the love which radically transformed the Roman Empire in 300 years. This is the love which is the historical moral bedrock of our civilization, whether we realize it or not. This is the love which impelled St. Francis to give up all his wealth and rebuild the church, for St. Patrick to abandon home and wealth and bring the good news to the Irish, for Mother Teresa to leave Albania and travel to the slums of India, caring for the poorest of the poor. This is the love which stopped slavery, infanticide, abortions; the love which introduced hospitals and care homes, humane treatment of prisoners, end of the death penalty. Everyone has evil within them, this is our fallen nature. However, everyone also has the capability of being redeemed, receiving forgiveness in Christ, and embarking on a life of wondrous loving, a life of giving life.

Do you wish that life? How do you see it being lived?

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

Day 115: Change

We are all connected to each other.

Yes.

We are all responsible for each other.

Yes. This illustration from the Bible may help, from the recordings of the prophet Ezekiel:

"As for you, son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you must warn them on my behalf. When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you must certainly die,' and you do not warn the wicked about his behavior, the wicked man will die for his iniquity, but I will hold you accountable for his death. But if you warn the wicked man to change his behavior, and he refuses to change, he will die for his iniquity, but you have saved your own life."

So, through Ezekiel, God is saying "if you see someone doing something wrong, and you do not warn them that it is wrong, you are as guilty of them doing it as they are themselves. If you warn them and they do not listen, then the guilt is with them only."

So I should warn a murderous dictator that what he is doing is wrong?

Yes – either by directly doing it yourself, or if you don't have access to him, but seeing that others who do have access are doing so. For example, if the leader of your country isn't telling that person that what he is doing is wrong, you could write to both of them and explain why you think it is wrong and what they can do to correct it.

And if I don't write that letter, I am as guilty as the dictator?

Yes. God gave <u>you</u> the insight that the dictator's action is wrong. If you don't warn the dictator, not only are you guilty of not saving them by warning them that they are doing wrong (and potentially saving their eternal life), you are guilty in part of all the harm caused through their actions.

There is no way I can stop everyone in the world from doing harm!!!

True – to think otherwise would be the height of arrogance.

Viewing that we are all connected and jointly responsible for humanity's actions, list three things that come to your mind as evil which should be stopped:

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

Day 116: Focus

So if I can't stop everyone from doing harm, yet if I don't warn them, I am equally guilty of their deeds, where do I go from there? No one can take that on.

Maybe take Jesus' approach: though there was a lot which was harmful happening in His time, He is not recorded as having sought to change most of it. Instead, He focussed totally on the relationship people had with God, and reserved His greatest criticisms for those who looked like they were following God but weren't in reality: hypocrites.

So I should focus on stopping the hypocrites?

Well, focus on where you are gifted – what you have perception for. Strive to "right the wrongs" where you have your greatest strengths.

Can you give me some examples?

You may be gifted to work with young people – perhaps you could mentor two or three into making wise and healthy decisions for their lives. You may be gifted with finances – perhaps you could teach those who need basic financial training to make their lives better. You could be gifted with mechanical knowledge – perhaps you could do things for others, or teach them how to do it themselves, so they could have better homes or other mechanical items – again, to improve their lives.

That won't change the world.

It will for those people. Perhaps you are gifted with communication and should indeed be writing letters to governments. Perhaps you join Amnesty International. Perhaps you are gifted with reasoning, logic, and understanding, and can teach people about God and their lives.

So I change aspects of the world as I am able to?

Exactly! You are not in isolation – you are part of all the Images of God brought together into one great people, working in love for each other and all in need – that is part of Christ's vision for His church. Every person changing aspects of the world as they are able to can cumulatively make a large impact. Each person is exploring their faith, and a good part of that is how God has them living it out in making the world better around them.

What are your gifts? What wrongs would you be most successful in working to right? What is stopping you, and how will you get around it? How could others help?

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

Day 117: The gift of God to the church

Hold on a minute – you're describing the church as if it's a group of people intensely focussed on loving relationships with each other, striving to make the world a better place, grateful to God and worshiping Him with enthusiasm?

Yes…

My understanding of church is that it is full of hypocrites who say one thing and do the opposite, and who, while claiming to be good, have in fact caused most of the harm in the world.

There are real problems within the church, not just outside of it. It's rather simple, actually.

Oh?

The church is made up of people.

People who are fallen, people who have evil in them, people who do the wrong things?

Yes.

So why should I be part of that?

Perhaps the greatest gift of the church for the people inside it is that they recognize that they are fallen, that they could do better, that they are not "holy super-disciples" – and God loves them anyway.

But God loves people outside the church too I thought you claimed.

Yes – but they are blind to that love. Since the people inside the church know of God's love, despite all our faults, we keep on trying – and that, perhaps, is the greatest gift God gives us. The gift to keep trying. To keep trying because God loves us. They gift of knowing that no matter what, God still loves you and will never stop loving you – loving you enough to die for you, regardless if you "succeed" or not.

Describe what it is like to try something not worrying about if you will be "successful" or not, but just trying it because it needs to be done – all the while knowing you will be loved regardless if you are "successful" or not.

Share your thoughts with others whom you trust.

Day 118: Hypocrites

But you're so hypocritical!

Yes. Sometimes, our hypocrisy is deliberate (in the technical definition of hypocrisy as "acting") – we know we are not holy, we are not righteous in ourselves, but we "fake it until we make it" – we try to do what is right even though we don't feel we are there ourselves.

Sometimes, our hypocrisy is blind – like teaching "say that you believe in Christ and then everything is all right and you can act however you want" (which hopefully isn't actually said, but can be implied) – we are blind to what Christ calls us to do, the cost of living His Way, and the changes that we need to make to our daily lives.

Sometimes, our hypocrisy is evil – we are fearful, we are hurt, we are greedy, we are selfish, we display our humanity to the full, and while claiming to be in God's kingdom, we really reside (for that time at least) in the kingdom of the world.

You are right, we can be hypocritical – we are human.

That realization, with its associated guilt, is part of what we bring to God when we meet together, ask for His forgiveness and guidance in how to do better, and listen to each other on how to do better as well.

The more you journey with Christ, the closer to God you get, the more of a gap you realize there truly is between yourself and God– none of us can love like God can. All we can do is try.

Describe what it is like to be loved despite every - single - thing you have done in your life which has harmed either yourself or someone else. Give specific thanks to God for loving you.

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

Day 119: Rest

We come again to the seventh day, so today we rest. 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. Decide again if you wish to continue journeying together or want to stop.

Know that God loves you.