Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Week 58: Adventures in Babysitting…

Caring for the flock.

There was a movie released in 1987 which covered the crazy events a babysitter went through in caring for the children one night. Starting in Matthew 8, we hear the crazy adventures Jesus and His disciples go through in caring for the children of God.

Day 399. Who is this man?

As He got into the boat, His disciples followed him. And a great storm developed on the sea so that the waves began to swamp the boat. But He was asleep. So they came and woke Him up saying, "Lord, save us! We are about to die!" But He said to them, "Why are you cowardly, you people of little faith?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it was dead calm. And the men were amazed and said, "What sort of person is this? Even the winds and the sea obey him!" (Matthew 8:23-27)

What just happened? The disciples knew who had authority over the heavens and the earth. *Everyone* knew it – and it wasn't humanity.

Psalm 104: … Your shout made the waters retreat; at the sound of Your thunderous voice they hurried off …

Psalm 135: … Yes, I know the Lord is great, and our Lord is superior to all gods. He does whatever He pleases in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all the ocean depths. He causes the clouds to arise from the end of the earth, makes lightning bolts accompany the rain, and brings the wind out of His storehouses….

Psalm 107: … They witnessed the acts of the Lord, His amazing feats on the deep water. He gave the order for a windstorm, and it stirred up the waves of the sea. They reached up to the sky, then dropped into the depths. The sailors' strength left them because the danger was so great. They swayed and staggered like drunks, and all their skill proved ineffective. They cried out to the Lord in their distress; He delivered them from their troubles. He calmed the storm, and the waves grew silent. The sailors rejoiced because the waves grew quiet, and He led them to the harbor they desired….

And the men were amazed and said, "What sort of person is this? Even the winds and the sea obey him!"

Jesus challenged the His audience to decide who He was, not by proclaiming it loudly, but by His words and actions living out what was improbable if not impossible. Jesus still challenges His audience to decide who He is, even today. Who do YOU say He is? What has He done in your life (or to the lives of others) which makes you say that?

Share with your fellow explorers.

Day 400: Who are the followers of this man?

So they came and woke Him up saying, "Lord, save us! We are about to die!" But He said to them, "Why are you cowardly, you people of little faith?" Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea… (Matthew 8:25-26)

How strange. Jesus doesn't say, "Good thing you woke me up, I've got this!" nor did He say, "Calm down, everything will be all right…". No, rather He upbraids His disciples: "Why are you afraid? Why are you timid? Why are you being cowards?" It's almost as if:

a.) He didn't think the danger was something to be afraid of, or
b.) He expected the disciples to be able to handle it.

Did He expect the disciples to be able to calm the storm, as He did? Did He expect them to do something which only God could do? Perhaps. Did He feel the danger was not, in the Kingdom-of-God viewpoint, something to be afraid of, as the worst it could do was physically kill you? Perhaps.

Two things are clear though: a.), He was expecting something of them that they were not expecting of themselves, and b.), He desired them not to be afraid. He desired them to have faith, to have trust in the Lord God who had created them. It's almost as if He was saying, "You will not die, even if you die – or have you not been listening to me all this time?" What will become clear over time is that Jesus expected His disciples to live as He lived, to do what He did, and proclaim what He proclaimed. Not to proclaim themselves as Messiah's – but to live the life of the Messiah, the life of a people redeemed. To be brave. A disciple is one who imitates the master.

Even to rebuking the wind, and the sea. Is Jesus expecting something of you, which you are not expecting of yourself?

What winds and seas are threatening the people of God where you live? These may be real, or metaphorical. Rebuke them and ask Jesus to rebuke them with you. What do you have to lose? The worst that can happen is that the winds continue, as if you had not rebuked them to start with. Don't think of this as a matter of faith or as testing yourself or the Lord. This is just imitating Christ, as He asks us to.

Share what you rebuke, and what happened if anything.

Day 401: On the other side

When He came to the other side, to the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met Him. They were extremely violent, so that no one was able to pass by that way. They cried out, "Son of God, leave us alone! Have you come here to torment us before the time?" A large herd of pigs was feeding some distance from them. Then the demons begged Him, "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs." And He said, "Go!" So they came out and went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep slope into the lake and drowned in the water. The herdsmen ran off, went into the town, and told everything that had happened to the demon-possessed men. Then the entire town came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw Him, they begged Him to leave their region. (Matthew 8:28-34)

He went to the other side of the lake, to the side where the Gentiles lived (Gadara was a member of the Decapolis, or "ten towns", associated with the Greeks, not the Jews). The Gentiles were the unclean people – they were the heathen, the ungodly. Amongst them were two demon-possessed men. Demon-possessed were the unclean of the unclean. Jesus drove the demons from the men into the pigs – pigs were an unclean animal, forbidden for the Jews. The unclean (spirits) entered the unclean (pigs, and killed them), to save the unclean (gentiles, who received life).

All of us are (or were) "unclean" in some fashion – we all fall short of the holiness which God Almighty, which Jesus the Christ, asks of us. And Christ comes to us and heals us. Once healed, we are unfit for our uncleanness – so it must leave us. Unclean behaviours lead to death – the unclean will invariably kill. The other side of uncleanliness is love: the pursuit of health, of life, of shalom. Love will invariably give life. Life removes death. Love removes unclean-ness.

The way of Christ is very simple: do you choose life, or do you choose death? If you choose Christ, you choose life, and there is no place for death in you – so Christ removes it and gives you life. Rebuke death and embrace life. Choose Christ. Life, true life, is now available, and freely given. That is Christianity in a nutshell.

The fact that Jesus approached gentiles (let alone healed them) would have been scandalous. And in this case, the healing caused problems! The people asked Him to leave because their pigs were no more. Jesus' actions were a parable: the unclean cannot stand to be with the Godly, especially with the Son of God – and the Godly, especially the Son of God, take away unclean-ness, so the unclean become clean. Are you aware of death you can rebuke? Are you aware of life you can embrace? Make some notes of each. List at least as many life-examples as you do of death-examples. Then, in talking with Jesus, rebuke the death items and encourage the life ones. As you are a child of God, the unclean cannot bear to be with you, and so you naturally clean those who are around you. This can be a hard concept to understand.

Share your list as appropriate.

Day 402: The Mission Field

After getting into a boat He crossed to the other side and came to his own town. Just then some people brought to Him a paralytic lying on a stretcher. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Have courage, son! Your sins are forgiven." Then some of the experts in the law said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming!"

When Jesus perceived their thoughts He said, "Why do you respond with evil in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—then He said to the paralytic — "Stand up, take your stretcher, and go home." So He stood up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were afraid and honored God who had given such authority to men. (Matthew 9:1-8)

I am so angry! I stood there for an hour arguing with him, and he still wouldn't believe me!

What were you arguing about?

The existence of Jesus, and how He wants to save him.

Ah! You were having an "Ant argument." (For a reminder on this, see the article "Ants used to be so superstitious!")

….

I suppose I was.

Do you really want to convince people about Jesus?

Yes. Jesus is life-giving.

True! How about instead of arguing, you just demonstrate?

What? How?

What did Jesus do in our example for today?

He told the person he was forgiven; He questioned those who objected; finally, He healed Him.

There you go. Do that, as best you can.

You've lost me.

Really? Ok: 1st. Find out what the person needs, and reassure the person that God, our Loving Heavenly Father, forgives them and wants them to have life. Note that forgiveness may need a change in behaviour, as Jesus often encouraged. 2nd, answer any questions that may arise. 3rd,

give them what they need – food, money, a trip to the hospital, to the shelter, prayer (always prayer!), etc. That's about it.

Don't preach to them?

Have you been given the gift of preaching?

Not really.

Then why given them something which you don't have? Meet their needs with what God has given you – out of your bounty, meet their scarcity. That's the Christian social rule in a nutshell.

For example, if someone steals something from you – you can tell them that if they return it, you will forgive them, and if they stop stealing from now on, God will forgive them. If it turns out they stole because they needed food, then you can provide them food. No great fuss, no preaching, just showing love in a practical way.

Today (and for the rest of your life), try to reveal your Christianity by personal examples. Write down what occurs.

Share your examples with those you trust

Day 403: Unity with God

"This man is blaspheming!"

Why did the experts in scripture think that Jesus was blaspheming?

In this case, because they thought Jesus was making Himself equivalent to God – only God could forgive (which is what a large part of the sacrificial system was about), yet here Jesus was freely announcing forgiveness with His own authority.

And Jesus did not disagree with their assumption! Instead of arguing the point, He reasserted that He did indeed have authority to forgive sins – and then provided a miracle to drive home His point.

This scandal was so extreme that it would lead to Jesus' death. No one was equivalent to God. Yet here, Jesus was acting (through the calming of the storm, the deliverance of the demoniac, and the forgiving of the sinful) as if He had full authority over the elements, the spiritual, and the reconciliation of humanity with God. He was doing things which were God's place to do.

Totally mind-blowing.

Exactly. Totally mind-blowing. This was more than any Old Testament prophet, any patriarch, more than anything even Moses himself had ever done.

Jesus was, as His disciples eventually realized, God Incarnate: God on earth in human form. He is God who wants to walk with you. Come to Him today, and re-invite Him into your life, to be with you and guide you, to love you and share His joy in you.

Share your thoughts with your fellow explorers.

Day 404: Sinners

As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax booth. "Follow me," He said to him. So he got up and followed Him. As Jesus was having a meal in Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with Jesus and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw this they said to His disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard this He said, "Those who are healthy don't need a physician, but those who are sick do. Go and learn what this saying means: '**I want mercy and not sacrifice**.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Matthew 9:9-13)

I can imagine the conversation:
Pharisee to Peter: "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"
Peter: "Who are you calling a sinner?"
Jesus: "Hold on Peter – actually, all of you are sinners."
Peter: "But! You know how insulting that is! … okay, you're right…"
Pharisee: "So, why?"
Jesus: "Those who are healthy …

The tax collectors were despised as traitors to the people, serving the conquering army of Rome. And Jesus walks up to this traitor and calls him to follow Him! Be part of His company! And then, He demonstrates full, restored, relationship by eating at his house, along with many other tax collectors and other equally sinful people! The Pharisees would have been shocked and bewildered: "Doesn't He realize what He is doing? How can He dare to be with these despicable people?"

Jesus' response demonstrated He knew exactly what He was doing. His is the way less comfortable, loving the unloved, not intruding where not wanted, but offering shalom in its many facets to those in need, and celebrating when they accept.

"I desire mercy and not sacrifice" is a reference to the writing of the prophet Hosea, "For I delight in faithfulness, not simply in sacrifice; I delight in acknowledging God, not simply in whole burnt offerings." (Hosea 6:6)

Obedience to the law is important, but even more important is to show mercy to those who are in need, as demonstrated by Jesus himself. The tax collectors, indeed, all sinners, need reconciliation – reconciliation with God, and with their wider community. We all need shalom.

Jesus is willfully breaking social customs in order to share the love of God. How can you share shalom with those you meet? Perhaps have a conversation with Jesus about it. Are there some social conventions which you'll need to cross? You live in the Mission Field.

Share your thoughts.

Day 405: 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.