Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Week 59: the adventure continues

Harvesting, or being harvested?

Day 406. Change

Then John's disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples don't fast?" Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot mourn while the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days are coming when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they will fast. No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment because the patch will pull away from the garment and the tear will be worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the skins burst and the wine is spilled out and the skins are destroyed. Instead they put new wine into new wineskins and both are preserved." (Matthew 9:14-17)

John the Baptist's disciples and the Pharisees followed typical practices with regard to fasting and prayer. Many Jews fasted regularly (Lev 16:29-34; 23:26-32; Num 29:7-11). The zealous fasted twice a week (cf. Luke 18:12), on Monday and Thursday.

What is Jesus saying here? Perhaps that something new is happening which affects His disciples but not John's nor the Pharisees (at least, not yet…)?

What new thing was happening through Jesus? Was the new incompatible with the old? Was the old passing away? What new thing was Jesus ushering in that He was so focused on, and why could it not happen within the status quo?

Is there anything in today's status quo which needs to change? What?

Share with your fellow explorers.

Day 407: Faith

As he was saying these things, a leader came, bowed low before him, and said, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her and she will live." Jesus and his disciples got up and followed him.

But a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for 12 years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. For she kept saying to herself, "If only I touch his cloak, I will be healed." But when Jesus turned and saw her he said, "Have courage, daughter! Your faith has made you well." And the woman was healed from that hour.

When Jesus entered the leader's house and saw the flute players and the disorderly crowd, he said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but asleep!" And they began making fun of him. But when the crowd had been forced outside, he went in and gently took her by the hand, and the girl got up. And the news of this spread throughout that region. (Matthew 9:18-26).

"My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her and she will live." "If only I touch His cloak, I shall be healed."

Say what? Would you say those things to a person on the street? Faith in Jesus had grown strong amongst many people, though many still doubted.

What is Jesus' response? "Have courage, daughter! Your faith has made you well."

"Your faith has made you well." People think of faith as something hard, or something mysterious, or a way of coercing God into doing what you want. Faith is simply trust. Faith is realizing the reality that your heavenly Father is all around you, and trusting in His love for you. Faith is knowing that Jesus is here for the lost and the forsaken. Faith is, as a friend of mine once said, "Father, I'd really, really love it if you took this cancer away from me. I know you can. However, whatever You decide." She died of that cancer, but that did not mean she was unfaithful – it just means that she died of the cancer. She had a vibrant life of giving to others, a husband who adored her, was well loved by many – all because of her faith and how she lived it. Despite her dying, her faith had made her well.

If you ask Jesus for a miracle, He may turn to you and say, "Have courage! Your faith has made you well." He may turn to you and say, "Have courage! You are where you are, for now." He may turn to you and say, "I am sorry – I am not called to "fix" the problem you are encountering. I will endure it with you, if you like." Or, He may say to you, "My dear brother / sister; it is time for you to finish the race, to stop the striving, to rest while My Father continues working towards His kingdom."

Faith may influence but is actually divorced from results. It is understanding that God loves you deeply, that God is with you, and that God is not a candy machine to drop something out every time you put in a dollar, and involving Him with your desires, your needs, and your pursuit of His kingdom.

What is your current thinking about faith? What would have been your reaction if you were with the woman and the leader? If you *were* the woman or the leader? Do you have examples of faith from your own life?

Share your thoughts on faith.

Day 408: That the blind may see

As Jesus went on from there, two blind men began to follow Him, shouting, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" When He went into the house, the blind men came to him. Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord." Then He touched their eyes saying, "Let it be done for you according to your faith." And their eyes were opened. Then Jesus sternly warned them, "See that no one knows about this!" But they went out and spread the news about him throughout that entire region. (Matthew 9:27-31)

It doesn't say how long they followed Him for. It may have been for only a few minutes, or it may have been for many kilometres, shouting, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" And yet, Jesus apparently did nothing, until they followed Him right into the house. Why didn't He respond right away? There are several instances where Jesus apparently ignores people (for example, when we get to Matthew 15:23-28). He Himself relates a story (Luke 18:1-8) encouraging persistence in bringing our needs before God.

Jesus' response is also fascinating: "Let it be done for you according to your faith."

Jesus seems to insist that living with God is a partnership: God has provided you with life, and everything needed to live that life. He asks for faith in response, living into that faith, demonstrating that faith. In a way, God says, "I give you my love. I yearn for your love."

Do you agree that living with God is a partnership? If you agree, what do you do as your part in the partnership? If you disagree, then how would you describe living with God?

Share as appropriate.

Day 409: Insisting on being blind

As they were going away, a man who was demon-possessed and unable to speak was brought to Him. After the demon was cast out, the man who had been mute began to speak. The crowds were amazed and said, "Never has anything like this been seen in Israel!" But the Pharisees said, "By the ruler of demons he casts out demons!" (Matthew 9:32-34)

Here we have another example of evil being driven away by God – and a person is healed. However, some, unable to accept that God may be demonstrating the freedom, health, and wholeness that He created us for, look for ways of denigrating what is happening. "It was a coincidence." "It didn't really happen like that." "It was because of x/y/z/ natural thing." Or in this case, "It's not because of God – it's because you are evil."

When good things happen to us, there may be natural events totally or mainly involved – God works across the natural and spiritual spheres, after all. The fact that antibiotics kill bacteria does not mean that God is removed from being involved in healing a person. The Pharisees had the same world-view as Jesus and His disciples, that God was intimately involved in human affairs – and so they did not argue for coincidence or natural causes, but rather that Jesus was tapping into the spiritual world yes, but harmful spirits, not God. They would not accept that Jesus was aligned with God, so this was the alternative which presented itself to them.

Some people refuse to believe, no matter what. They would rather remain blind than admit the truth. Let them be, and move on. Continue to love them, but focus on fertile ground, not barren.

What is the most productive way for you to show the love of God to yourself and those around you? Are there people which it would be healthiest for you to leave where they are unless they turn themselves around?

Share your thoughts with those you trust

Day 410: Caring for the sheep

"Then Jesus went throughout all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were bewildered and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest-ready fields." (Matthew 9:35-38)

Jesus has continued, declaring that something new was being demonstrated, and then raising from the dead, healing, making the blind see, healing in many ways and preaching the good news that God's Kingdom was now available to all who desired it. He was "harvesting", in the sense that He was bringing into God's house what had been seeded by the Holy Spirit. And now He encourages His disciples (and us) to request that the Lord of the Harvest (God) send out more workers to harvest, so that all who are ready may be brought into God's Kingdom.

The idea that the Kingdom of God was imminent would be the culmination of the desires of the people of Israel. Jesus was inviting His disciples to be part of it.

How can you tell if someone is ready for the Kingdom of God (harvest-ready)? Are there people in your community who are bewildered and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd? How can you be like Jesus, in your context? Should you be like Jesus?

Share your thoughts with your fellow explorers.

Day 411: Harvesters

Jesus called His disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits so they could cast them out and heal every kind of disease and sickness. Now these are the names of the 12 apostles: first, Simon (called Peter), and Andrew his brother; James son of Zebedee and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. Jesus sent out these 12… (Matthew 10:1-5a)

Jesus called His disciples …

Remember that a disciple is one who disciplines themselves to live as their teacher lives (as a reminder, refer back to weeks 42-44). The disciples had prayed with Jesus, eaten with Jesus, listened to Jesus, talked with Jesus. They had witnessed His many works and how He demonstrated His Fathers' love. And now, Jesus called them to Him and said, "Ok, your turn. Do what you've seen me do, say what you've heard me say – I give you my authority to do so, just as my Father gave me His authority."

Jesus shared the kingdom with many, healed many, and called all to enter His Father's kingdom. However, He actually called few to be His disciples, fellow harvesters with Him. Are you called by Christ to be a disciple of His? If "yes", that is a life apart from the world, focussing on bringing people into Christ's family, and striving to live as Christ lived. If "no", then Christ still calls you to live the life intended for you: one of loving, of caring, of sacrificial living, of worship – a life which, by its daily patterns, greatly glorifies God and dances with Him and all who will enter into shalom with Him. Some are harvesters, most are the harvest. In either way, be blessed, in Christ.

Share your calling with those you trust.

Day 412: 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.