Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

The Path has a cost – Week 8

Our choices, our words, our actions – all have consequences. The way we live our life has consequences.

Day 50: The Path is costly.

To recap briefly, the Path which God desires is for you to:

- talk to God and hear from God
- trust God like a child trusts the most loving Father or Mother you can imagine
- seek out the healthiest actions for yourself and for others
- do those healthy actions
- build each other up, thank God in word and song, re-commit to being one with Him (and receive His recommitment), and share the good news that He desires all to live together in love, with Him.

What's that last part?

I snuck that in – we haven't covered it yet but will in the future. I just want to give a little forewarning that there is more to come. God's path involves comforting, helping, healing – in short: loving. There is a cost to God's path though, and it is important to know the cost. *There's always a catch!*

There's always a cost, yes – and it's important you know what it is before you decide to fully commit to joining Jesus on His path. *You want my money, right?*

The cost is that you must die. *What?*

Not physically! At least, probably not physically.

The cost of following Jesus and His path is that you give up following your own independent path, with whatever adventures you may have on it, and instead discipline yourself to following His way of health and love (including the commands we have already covered) – regardless of what your emotions may desire, regardless of what advantages you see by following a different path.

The cost is that you must die to your own desires and live to Jesus' desires. You must refuse to seek to 'be god' like Adam and Eve did. You must refuse to strike out against another like Cain did. You must refuse to do whatever you want, whenever you want, regardless of the cost to others, like the people in the story of Noah did. You must refuse to seek your own way to "the promised land", like those in the story of the Tower of Babel.

What do you mean <u>probably</u> not physically?

Well, Jesus Himself showed us, and followers of His have commonly found throughout history, that insisting on following His path frequently can put us at odds with the rest of society – and consequences have included mockery, banishment, imprisonment, torture, even death. This happens in parts of the world even today. It is a possible part of the cost.

Write down your thoughts regarding Jesus' Path.

Write down your thoughts regarding the possible cost of following Jesus' Path.

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

Day 51: Committing to the Path

The cost of Jesus' Path is so important to Christians (those who follow Jesus) that when they decide to fully commit to it, their beginning point is to ceremoniously die. *Again: what??*

It's called 'baptism', which is from a Greek word meaning 'immersion.' During this ceremonial death, the person commits to not follow unhealthy ways and practices, and instead focus on following the Path of Jesus. They 'put to death', you could say, their previous practices and beliefs, and replace them with the belief in a loving God and living in love as God desires them to. *What if I don't want to die? What if I don't want baptism?*

We're a long way from asking you if you want to be baptised. The point right now is that though Jesus' Path is the Path of Life, there is a cost to it, and the church (another name for the followers of Jesus) takes that cost very seriously indeed.

Review the past 7 weeks and collect your thoughts together. What strikes you now about what you have learned, and what you have tried? What has been the most impactful to you? What has been the most helpful? What are your current thoughts and feelings? What are you hoping for as we continue this journey together? What are your fears? Can you explain the idea of putting to death your old life to take up a new one?

Discuss your thoughts with your fellow explorers.

Day 52: Count the cost

Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone wants to become my follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will find it. (Matthew 16:24-25)

Jesus was very clear – He called for a radical life of living much differently from how the world normally worked. He was a revolutionary. To join the revolution, you must leave behind what holds you to the world – your previous life of how you did things. Of the first dozen or so followers of Jesus, many were fishermen – and Jesus took them from fishing for fish, to fishing for people. One was a taxman – and Jesus took him from writing up taxes, to writing up the good news of Jesus' life, death, and message. Their focus changed from making a living in the world, to living in God's country. They had to change. And many of them physically lost their lives because of it.

History has many examples of people who changed due to the call of Christ – St. Francis of Assisi. Mother Teresa. Martin Luther King Jr. Many examples in the Bible, in the early church, and up to today. Some changed careers, some changed in other ways.

Do you think God wants you to change? How? Write a few words on what it means to deny yourself for Christ.

Share your thoughts with your others you trust.

Day 53: Why change?

So, Jesus was a person who taught people to change because God's Kingdom, or Country, or Way of Living, was near.

Yes.

And people joined Him because they thought they could be part of this revolution.

Yes.

He taught them rules and ways of living which were different from how people usually approach things, and difficult in some ways.

Yes.

It's been 2000 years. The revolution hasn't succeeded. It asks for my death. Why should I change, even if they did? Is it really worth the cost?

You're right that it's been 2000 years. I'd argue your claim that the revolution isn't succeeding – but you'll have to convince yourself, not have me do it. There is a path, and the path has a cost. Jesus didn't just reveal the path through His words, He revealed it through His actions. We have the privilege of looking at this in retrospect, which His original students didn't have – so His actions confused them a lot. If you'll continue with us, we'll look at Jesus' actions next.

How has Jesus' revolution succeeded? Not succeeded? How have you found following His way so far? What are your thoughts about being part of His revolution?

Share your thoughts with your others you trust.

Day 54: Jesus' Baptism

Jesus' ministry began with His baptism by His cousin John. John had been saying that God was telling him of the coming of the Messiah, the Messiah who would bring God's Kingdom into the world, in triumph and conquest, the Messiah ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead.

Jesus comes by, and John exclaims, "Look! Here He is! Here is the Anointed One! The Judge!" John then had a great surprise, for He identified Jesus as "the one", and Jesus tells him, "You need to baptize me."

And John goes: "What? You need to baptize me! YOU'RE the one with the power over who gets into the Kingdom, the Country of God, and who doesn't!"

But Jesus insists, so John baptizes Him. Then, something else happens: the Spirit of God descends like a dove and alights on Jesus. Not the hammer of judgment, the fire of condemnation, or the terrifying power of the cosmos, but a dove – a dove of peace.

This is a surprise to John like you're expecting a hot shower, and receive not just a cold shower, but a cold shower with ice-cubes. And God Almighty breathes out and declares "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Confirming Jesus and His approach beyond all doubt.

There is not going to be any armed rebellion against Rome, no magnificent crushing of enemies, no death and destruction until "good" finally prevails, no triumph and conquest in that fashion – no vengeance at all, really.

In fact, if they only knew it, there was going to be sacrifice, and hurt, and death, and despair, … and resurrection, followed by disbelief, until finally, transformation.

What Jesus knew, but John didn't, is that Jesus didn't come to lord it over us but walk with us. Jesus was sent to the people of Israel to preach Peace – peace in the full Hebrew sense, the sense of Shalom: peace, harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, wellness, tranquility, not only of one's body but one's relationships, (especially one's relationship with God) all bound up in what we call "Love" – doing the best (healthiest) for another.

Jesus was baptised to demonstrate to all that God, the "Creator Of All", wants to walk with us, not Lord it over us. If only they knew what this fully meant.

How could God walk with us? What is so important about Shalom? What is stopping you from living in shalom?

Share your thoughts with your others you trust.

Day 55: Being a student

"As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee Jesus saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew (they were fishermen). He said to them, "Follow me, and I will turn you into fishers of people!" They left their nets immediately and followed him. Going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and his brother John, in a boat with their father, mending their nets. Then he called them. They immediately left the boat and their father and followed him."

Jesus was apparently a charismatic personality who could gather people around Him. Starting with Simon, Andrew, James, and John, he gathered a band of students to join His revolution. He was intent on His mission: "I will turn you into fishers of people!" And they left their previous lives to follow Him.

How would you fish for people? Is there someone you have left your previous life for (perhaps getting married, having a child, or someone else)? What would Jesus have to be like for you to change your life and be His student full time?

Share your thoughts with your others you trust.

Day 56: 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.