Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

## *The door opens – Week 23*

*Change.*

## Day 154: Fear

*I didn't say the prayer.*

Why not?

*I'm afraid, and I'm angry, and this is all super silly. I would use stronger language but you'd probably censor me.*

What are you afraid of? What are you angry about?

*I'm afraid … I'm afraid of God if He exists. I'm afraid of giving my life over to someone else who I cannot control. I'm angry because this implies that my entire life to this point has been a waste, that I'm not good enough to do things on my own like I want to, that this means, fundamentally, that everything must change. And <expletive deleted>, I KNOW that I'm good enough. Didn't God create me to be "good enough?"*

Being afraid of God is very healthy and wise. The Bible repeatedly says, "Fear God." Even Jesus said that. I think that being afraid shows us that we finally truly realize the magnitude of what we're doing. I think being afraid shows us the reality of our existence, created, here for only a very short time, of very limited influence and capability, when compared to the majesty, the power, the supra-existence of God. God IS. Everything else is created. In my mind, when I am speaking to God, I will often start with something like "Hello, YOU ARE – it's me again. We have an issue here that I need help with …". That fear though, is only the first step.

*What do you mean?*

When that fear is fully upon you, but then you also realize that even though that fear is from a knowledge of the true nature of reality between you and God, an even greater reality, an even greater truth, is that God's extreme love for you overrides any desire God may have to cause you harm of any kind. The fact that God loves you to the extreme depths of His being, that He taught (and teaches) the way of His path, that He gave His life in sacrifice for you, and then He rose for you so you need not even fear death; that He walks with you each and every moment of each and every day, whether you realize it or not – that love, when truly understood, can only give rise to a gratitude that overlays the fear, that becomes deeper because of the truth of the fear, that fills your heart and soul to overflowing. It's what we call a "mountain top experience."

*I'm going to have that?*

Maybe. Every person is different. Being filled with fear though, is, ironically, a good start for it.

Why are you afraid of God? Why aren't you?

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

## Day 155: Anger

*What about my previous life? Is that a waste? If so, I have every right to be angry.*

All the harmful things (to yourself and others), all the seeking after worldly things which will not last (such as riches, fame, fortune, power) – yes. Total waste.

*You <expletive deleted>.*

Let me clarify – I'm not saying your previous life is a waste. I am saying, though, that all the harmful things you have done to yourself, and others, are at least a waste, if not destructive. I am saying that targeting and trying to achieve earthly things which are actually of no value (riches, fame, fortune, power), that is a waste. But even in those 'wasteful' activities, God still was with you, God still gave you what you needed, God still loved (and loves) you. And you learned things, things which can help you in following and serving Christ.

Your anger is justified because it is related to grief. Paul wrote about this in the bible when he said, "I now regard all things as liabilities compared to the far greater value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things —indeed, I regard them as dung! (he actually used a much stronger word that has been censored) —that I may gain Christ and be found in him." You are allowed to grieve over what you once valued, but no longer do – and the (in some cases, incredible) effort and time you spent pursuing them.

*You're not pulling any punches, are you?*

I can't afford to. We all are Images of God but due to our fallen, self-serving, natures we sabotage ourselves (and others). We all have intrinsic value as human beings created and loved by God. In our second birth (being born into full relationship with Christ), we awaken to our worth in His love rather than our worth based on our performance. It's not a matter of being good enough; it's a matter of knowing where our worth comes from. We act in love out of that realization - not out of this oppressive sense that we're not good enough.

Let me put it another way: you can't get into one-ness with Life itself, and the source of all life, unless you create a relationship with Life. In that relationship, you realize that the source of all life is sentient, has always existed, will always exist, wants shalom, and wants you to be part of it with Him – in fact, that is why He created you. It's not logical: you cannot pursue life without having a relationship with life.

*I want that relationship with life. I just don't want the church. Or Jesus. Or "God."*

God is the source of all life. God is life itself. Jesus is the Son of God, who shows us the way and walks with us. The church is the temple of God – the people who God dwells in, and who explore how to live in shalom with God. All of it is there for relationship with God. Walking away from it, you walk away from life.

*Argh!*

I'm sorry.  I suggest you express your fears, your anger, your frustration with your small group, not asking for answers or reassurance, but just for listening.  And I suggest you do the same with God, speaking to Him out loud or in your head.  Read some of the bible, for example the Gospels or New Testament letters – the above snippet from Paul is from his letter to the Philippians. Ponder and pray.

Giving yourself totally over to the source of all life, to God Himself – what does that mean for your life?

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

## Day 156: Necessity of Change

*Can we pretend I said the prayer and continue on?*

Let's continue one, but not pretend you have asked God to take over your life if indeed you haven't.

*But I don't want to change.*

Aye, there's the rub, eh? Most of us don't like change. However, God wants us to change from being blind selfish harmful creatures, to being wise loving life-giving creatures. Images of Him who delight to live with Him. None of us are there – not even those who have been members of His Temple, His Church, all their lives. As we get to know God in His immensity and His specificness – He created this huge wondrous universe, and yet He wants to have an intimate, loving, supportive relationship with you; as we realize that and come to God in awe and gratitude, we find we change.

*So 'el presto', I'll be changed?*

The rest of your life is pursuing that change. You'll find that some people are very God-like in their love and wisdom – and some are not. That's not the point. The point is that you become one of the people who pursue loving relationship in community with God and are intentionally doing that together. We'll talk about that tomorrow.

What fears of change do you have?

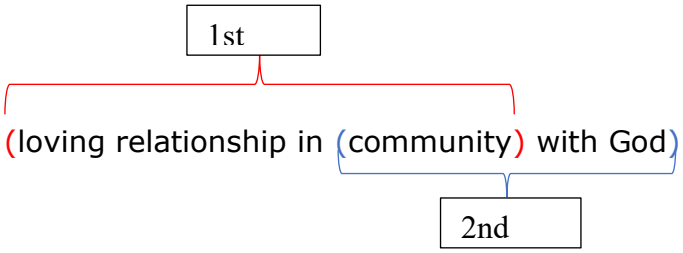
Share your answers with others whom you trust

## Day 157: The people of God

*What exactly am I getting myself into?*

The people of the church are different from the world because we are the people of the loving relationship in community with God. Don't believe everything you hear from the world, don't get disheartened by all that can discourage or dismay – when you are in God's church, you are part of the loving relationship in community with God, and you filter everything (hopefully) through the eyes of Christ. Note that we frequently get it wrong, and need much prayer – however, this is our identity.

Knowing this, defining ourselves as such, our path becomes clear: to experience and share that loving relationship in community with God. To seek out what is healthiest for the person (whomever they may be), and then act on that. That is the path, and that is the first half of how we walk it. The second half of walking it is to walk with God, together; for not only do we need to build up our relationships with each other, we need to renew our relationship with God, every day. How we are different, our path, and how we walk, can all be summed up as:




Isn't that simple? It is the bedrock of what we are.

Saying that prayer first of all commits you to relating to God, and second of all commits you to a community of like-minded individuals, all pursuing that same end. No matter how much you like or dislike them, how much you agree or disagree, you belong, for in Christ Jesus, you are one. Belonging gives you no rights, but many obligations. Instead of rights, you are given a free gift – an eternal life with the source of Life, Love Itself. Paradoxically, this can lead to confusion, scorn, and rejection from your fellow humans, who do not realize that they themselves are also Images of God, created to have the very same relationship in the very same community.

*And this all happens "by magic?"*

No! We must learn, and we must teach. That is why this course actually exists.

*And here I thought it was just to have a good time.*

See how sneaky we are?

Give examples (from any part of your life) where you have found:

a.) Loving relationship in community
b.) Community with God
c.) Both together

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

## Day 158: Transformation

*So, let's say I said the prayer.*

Good for you!  That takes a lot of courage.

*Should I feel different?*

Some people feel a great emotional response – it may be heaviness, it may be fear, uncertainty, doubt, but it is usually gratitude and joy.  Some people don't feel anything.  Emotional responses vary – this is true not only for this specific prayer, but also in the ongoing walk with Christ.

*So, if I don't feel anything, I haven't really changed?*

Actually, you're totally transformed – emotions have nothing to do with it.

*How am I transformed?*

If you said the prayer and meant it, then you have given your life, everything you are and have, to Christ.  If you meant it, you now have asked God to make you aware of His active, ongoing relationship with you.  If you meant it, you have the certainty of eternal life with Him, a life of shalom in His presence.  If you meant it, you are now committed to changing the world according to God's design and desire.  If you meant it, you put your own ego, your own desire for fame, fortune, power, etc. – to death.  If you meant it, you are now willing to sacrifice everything, even your life, to further the reign of God, because that is all that truly matters.  If you meant it, you know that no matter what happens, you will live forever with Him.  You will not be damned, because you have rejected following yourself, and dedicated yourself to following God.  It is total transformation.  Though be gentle with yourself!  We all make mistakes and need to acknowledge and ask forgiveness for them, and then follow Christ back to His healthy path.

*Ouch.  I mean, wow.*

Your reaction made me laugh.  Yes, it is a dramatic transformation.  Most of all though, take this as certainty:  1.) God has overwhelming love for you, and that will never stop 2.) God is calling you by name, to participate with Him in redeeming the world into His Kingdom, His Country.  We lay down our lives by making ourselves vulnerable, reaching out in love, laying down our pride, our need to "get our own way", etc., in simple everyday situations.

Describe your thoughts regarding the paragraph between "How am I transformed?" and "Ouch…"

Share your thoughts with others whom you trust.

## Day 159: Next steps

*So … what's next?*

Now we're ready to talk about baptism.

*Baptism? Day 51?*

Exactly.

*I go through a ceremony and I'm in?*

Not yet! There are two ways people are baptised in the Anglican church:

1.) When someone is unable to decide for themselves (typically because they are infants or very young), their parents and sponsors pledge to bring them into a full living of the life of Christ in God's Country, or
2.) When someone commits themselves to a full living of the life of Christ. They still need to be sponsored and baptized by someone who has previously been baptized and is striving already to live the life, however.

*So, if I've said the prayer, I've been transformed as you say, and am ready?*

Is your life showing you are ready? Have you learned why God desperately wants you in His Family? Do you know what He calls the church to do with the world? Do you have full trust in your Lord and Saviour, Jesus the Christ?

*No, no, no, and not full trust – but I thought I was an explorer, not someone who has arrived!*

We are all exploring, and none of us have arrived – but it is important that you have *started.* If you truly meant that prayer then you want to start walking the path, not just know about it.

Should someone be baptised a.) immediately if they ask for it (or their parents do) with the assumption that they will hold true and be a vital part of the life of the church, or b.) should they demonstrate that they have at least started exploring the Path of Life before they are "let in"? A follow up question if you know: how many, after they are baptised, have you seen continue and become vibrant and vital members of the community of Christ with you?

Share your thoughts with those you trust.

## Day 160: 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.