

Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Week 77: The Gathering Storm

Day 532: Hypocrisy

Now while Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of expensive perfumed oil, and she poured it on his head as he was at the table. When the disciples saw this, they became indignant and said, “Why this waste? It could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor!” When Jesus learned of this, he said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a good service for me. For you will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me! When she poured this oil on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.” (Matthew 26:6-13)

“at the house of Simon the leper.” This is said as if it’s just to identify where He was, similar to “George the short one.” However, being at the house of a leper would have meant disease and being outcast ... unless, of course, the leper had been healed. Therefore, this is a house where Jesus is welcomed quite possibly because He has healed the homeowner, a certain Simon. There is a good history of love being reciprocated here. In Jesus’ day, such a note would probably cause a shock followed by “Aha!” as realization hit.

During the gathering, a woman comes and does something which makes the disciples very upset. Why?

In Jesus’ time, it was customary for families to purchase perfumed oils held in sealed alabaster (a soft stone) jars. These were “single use only” perfumes (the jar would be broken to open it), intended to be used in the burial rites of a loved one. They were very expensive (the Gospel of John relates a similar event, where the oil is valued at “300 denarii”, or about one year’s wages).

The disciples are probably upset for two reasons:

- a.) The one they state: ‘she’s using burial oil at a non-burial! If she didn’t want it, why not sell it and donate the money to those who need it – that could feed a lot of hungry mouths!’
- b.) The one they obfuscate: Jesus had predicted His death (again), and unlike the women, the men are in denial. ‘This is burial oil! It should be used as such!’ Jesus addresses this reason head-on: ‘She is. She is preparing Me for My burial.’

The woman is anointing Jesus in an offering of love and dedication. Sometimes the way to love God is to love those around us, who are in need. Sometimes, the best way is to love God directly. She had chosen the latter path – and Jesus was thankful.

Being in denial can quickly lead to hypocrisy, where we act out what we want (or how we think others should behave or regard us) rather than what is reality. It is important to keep our awareness in reality. Jesus has told the disciples several times that He is about to be killed, and they are not accepting it (at least, the men aren’t). Their “this should have been given to the poor!”, while it would help the poor, is hypocritical in that they are judging a gift of love to be wanting, from an attitude of superiority, while the object was not theirs to give.

Have you had a time where you had a hard time accepting reality and tried to act out a 'preferred reality'? In a severe form, this can be a form of psychosis or even split personality. In a mild form, it can be doing a preferred activity (such as watching tv) instead of a needed activity (such as taking out the garbage in a snowstorm) while hoping the reality will 'go away of its own accord' so to speak. As well, many times people experience judgment when others do not understand the full reality of their situation. Note down some of your own experiences:

Share with those you trust.

Day 533: Reality

Then one of the twelve, the one named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, “What will you give me to betray him into your hands?” So they set out 30 silver coins for him. From that time on, Judas began looking for an opportunity to betray him.
(Matthew 26:14-16)

Now the wheel turns. Judas is either disillusioned with Jesus, or trying to force Jesus’ hand, but either way, He decides to be the betrayer. And the Priests’ give 30 pieces of silver, as per Zechariah 11:12-13:

Then I said to them, If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them. And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver. Then the Lord said to me, Throw it to the potter—the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord, to the potter.

The irony is palpable: ‘He has claimed one-ship with God? We shall give Him what God got.’

Jesus’ prediction will come about very soon.

List times where you have been disillusioned with God, or tried to force God’s hand:

Share with those you trust.

Day 534: Betrayer revealed

Now on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?" He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is near. I will observe the Passover with my disciples at your house."'" So the disciples did as Jesus had instructed them, and they prepared the Passover.

When it was evening, he took his place at the table with the twelve. And while they were eating he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me." They became greatly distressed and each one began to say to him, "Surely not I, Lord?" He answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man will go as it is written about him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would be better for him if he had never been born." Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" Jesus replied, "You have said it yourself." (Matthew 26:17-25)

Why was it necessary that Jesus be betrayed, rather than just arrested off the street? Why was it that it was one of the inner circle who betrayed Him? Could it have been any more bitter, any more painful? Is God saying, 'I shall endure the most humiliation, the most pain, the most degradation – for you'?

And about the betrayer – is there a bit of him in each of us? Does he deserve our condemnation, or our sympathy and compassion? What must Jesus have thought?

Share your thoughts and wonderings with your fellow explorers.

Day 535: Reality Changes, Again

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks he broke it, gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat, this is my body." And after taking the cup and giving thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, that is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, from now on I will not drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.
(Matthew 26:26-30)

We could spend years on this one little paragraph. Passover was about eating the sacrificial lamb (or goat) in remembrance of God delivering the Israelites from Egypt. And Jesus, like usual, takes the known and transforms it radically. He takes bread, "Eat this – it is my sacrificial body for you." He takes wine, "Drink this – it is my sacrificial blood for you." Suddenly, it's all about Him.

As was recorded in the Gospel of John, 'Jesus said to them, "I tell you the solemn truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in yourselves. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood resides in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so the one who consumes me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven; it is not like the bread your ancestors ate, but then later died. The one who eats this bread will live forever." (John 6:53-58)

This is about much more than an escape from earthly slavery in a different country. This is about life. Literally, life and death – not just now, but forever. This is about communion, one-ship, with God. This is about salvation and rediscovering the purpose for which we are made.

Share your thoughts with your fellow explorers.

Day 536: I will never fall away!

Then Jesus said to them, “This night you will all fall away because of me, for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I am raised, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.” Peter said to him, “If they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away!” Jesus said to him, “I tell you the truth, on this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” Peter said to him, “Even if I must die with you, I will never deny you.” And all the disciples said the same thing.
(Matthew 26:31-35)

You will fall away. There will be times when you do not see the shepherd, hear the shepherd, feel the shepherd’s presence. We all scatter if we are not lead. Peter and the rest of the disciples try to deny this truth: “Lord, we shall never abandon you, even if everyone else does!”

The truth is, reality is too much to cope with on our own resources – and God knows this. It is the way God has created us. Therefore, we need to develop a discipline where, when we realize that we are not seeing, hearing, or feeling Christ, that we seek Him out. We cry out to Him. We come before Him, admitting our inability to persevere on our own (see Psalm 18:6, 34:6, 34:15-17). Go to God in prayer, seek Him out, Wait on Him. He will make Himself known to you and will shepherd you forward. That is what Communion is all about.

Have there been times when you have not felt the nearness of God? Have there been times when you felt God’s presence, God’s leading? What have been the differences in the circumstances and your actions?

Share with your fellow explorers.

Day 537: Fully Human

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and he became anguished and distressed. Then he said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, even to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake with me." Going a little farther, he threw himself down with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me! Yet not what I will, but what you will." (Matthew 26:36-39)

Jesus wants the disciples' support but also wants to concentrate on conversation with the Father (what we call "prayer"). We may need the support of someone near us, even while we focus on something else – just to know that person is holding us in their thoughts, in their prayers, that they care. Jesus was human just like us.

Jesus was so sad He felt like dying. What He was going to face was troubling, dramatic, and painful – and the reasons requiring it were sorrowful beyond comprehension. Jesus was human just like us.

Jesus asked that He not have to endure what was to come. Jesus was human just like us.

Jesus submitted His will, His desires, to the over-riding will of the Father. Jesus was showing one-ship with the Father, which can be an example to follow for humans just like us.

Jesus was fully human, feeling doubts, despair, joy, happiness, sadness. His humanness means that we also can live in subjection to the Father as He did – it is humanly possible.

It requires great discipline, the discipline of saying (and living), "Not my will, by Yours." Not my will, but Yours, Oh Christ." "Not my will, but Yours, Oh Father."

Are you prepared to give up your will, for the will of Your Heavenly Father? Capture your thoughts here.

Share with your fellow explorers as you feel appropriate.

Day 538: 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. Love. Pursue what is healthiest. Order your life as one pursuing facilitating as many people as possible to find the Kingdom of God. Be brave, trust God, Love.