

Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Week 79: The Passion Continues

Day 546: The fruit of pride

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A slave girl came to him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.” But he denied it in front of them all: “I don’t know what you’re talking about!” When he went out to the gateway, another slave girl saw him and said to the people there, “This man was with Jesus the Nazarene.” He denied it again with an oath, “I do not know the man!” After a little while, those standing there came up to Peter and said, “You really are one of them too—even your accent gives you away!” At that he began to curse, and he swore with an oath, “I do not know the man!” At that moment a rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: “Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly. (Matthew 26:69-75).

Peter tried. He really, really tried. He was the first to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ. He walked on the water. If Jesus wanted something, he jumped in with both feet, often to his later chagrin. When Jesus told the inner group of disciples that one of them would betray Him, and all of them would abandon Him, Peter was the most vehement in declaring, “even if everyone else abandons you, I will not! I would die first!”

Jesus responded, “You will die for Me? No Peter – it will be the other way. And you will deny me not once, not twice, but three times, before the rooster cries.

It had unfolded just as Jesus predicted (Matthew 26:33-35).

In response, Peter breaks – and cries bitterly. He had failed His master yet again.

We all fail at some time, and some place. Failing God, as depicted in the story of Adam and Eve, is part of the human condition. Not because God wants us to fail, not because we want to fail ourselves, but because we destined to do so. We, as creatures, are incapable of living up to Almighty God.

Recognizing that though, owning that, we can choose how to respond. For example, Luke tells the story of a “lady of ill repute” who approached Jesus (Luke 7:36-50):

Therefore I tell you, her sins, which were many, are forgiven, thus she loved much; but the one who is forgiven little loves little.” Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

She had failed God, just as Peter did, just as we all do. Jesus’ audience was waiting for Him to condemn her. Instead of condemning, however, Jesus extended forgiveness and restoration.

When someone came in exhibiting arrogance, pride, and harmful behaviour to others, Jesus was critical. When they came in showing humility, sorrow, regret, and seeking healthy behaviour, Jesus was encouraging, healing, forgiving. Peter had acted with pride and arrogance and now has fallen from that. His bitter tears are a good sign that he is opening himself up for forgiveness and healing. The problem isn’t if we will fail – the problem is if we will have faith.

When we fail, it is important to remember that we are loved by a love which knows no bounds – and to have faith in that love will not fail. List some times in which you have “failed.” Now, list why God loves you regardless.

Share with those you trust.

Day 547: When everything is against you.

When it was early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people plotted against Jesus to execute him. They tied him up, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor. (Matthew 27:1-2)

All the chief priests. All the elders. The entire society leadership, religious and social, were united in their opposition to Jesus. They brought Him to Pontius Pilate, the ultimate local authority, the one authorized to use fatal force. The religion of God Almighty was now allied with the greatest empire on earth ... to eliminate the Son of God. The representatives of humanity, religious and secular, were now united in their opposition to the will of God.

What Jesus had prophesied, the path that He thought the Father wanted, was now underway. In their fear, their anger, their greed, the foolish authorities are attempting what had worked since time began, and still works today: first cajole, then intimidate, and finally, if required, eliminate. It was Cain and Abel: "I am fearful and jealous, so I will eliminate you." It was the Tower of Babel: "I will find my own way to salvation – not the way You open up to me."

Have you had a time when someone tried to coerce or force you into changing your way? How did you respond? What was the result?

Share with those you trust.

Day 548: Lost Hope

Now when Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus had been condemned, he regretted what he had done and returned the 30 silver coins to the chief priests and the elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood!" But they said, "What is that to us? You take care of it yourself!" So Judas threw the silver coins into the temple and left. Then he went out and hanged himself. (Matthew 27:3-5).

Peter realized how he had rejected Jesus, and he wept bitterly.

Judas realized how he had rejected Jesus, and he killed himself.

The first reaction opens up the opportunity for forgiveness and renewal. The second reaction stops all opportunity for moving forward in health.

Do not ever give in to despair. Weep yes, be sorrowful, yes – but never let go that you have an eternal Father who loves you.

But sometimes life seems so dark, and it feels like nothing will end the darkness.

That is listening to the lie. It is not life that is dark, it is death. All darkness, even death itself, will eventually end. Light shines in the darkness, and life succeeds beyond death. This is the promise from our Father. Do not listen to the lie; listen to the truth.

How can I tell the difference?

If anything tells you that you are not loved, it is a lie. If anything tells you that you cannot be loving, it is a lie. God created you in His Image – if you are that important, then let nothing take that importance away from you.

Everyone has doubts, everyone has sad times, everyone has regrets, everyone at some point wishes things could be different – even Jesus did (witness his praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, and his asking the disciples (John 6:67) **"Do you want to leave me too?"**).

Never shut the door on God. Instead, call out to Him (as shared in Jeremiah 29:11-14): **'For I know what I have planned for you,' says the Lord. 'I have plans to prosper you, not to harm you. I have plans to give you a future filled with hope. When you call out to me and come to me in prayer, I will hear your prayers. When you seek me in prayer and worship, you will find me available to you. If you seek me with all your heart and soul, I will make myself available to you,' says the Lord**

List when you have had doubts, sad times, regrets. Then, list when you have felt blessed by God. Strive for the discipline of always talking with God, both in good times and bad, knowing that neither lasts, but your relationship with God can last for eternity.

Share your thoughts and wonderings with your fellow explorers.

Day 549: No defence

Then Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus said, “You say so.” But when he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he did not respond. Then Pilate said to him, “Don’t you hear how many charges they are bringing against you?” But he did not answer even one accusation, so that the governor was quite amazed. (Matthew 27:11-14)

Jesus did not defend Himself – and that was His greatest defense. He was not out to “prove anyone right”, He was not interested in “having His way”, He did not want to prove by argument. He was here to heal, not to force or coerce.

He knew that the only way for someone to accept salvation was for them to accept Him, from the heart – and for the world to accept Him, He needed to be raised up, killed, cast down, and then ascend into the heavens. At least, that was the theory.

What do you mean, “that was the theory?”

Well, Jesus was God Incarnate, and Jesus was fully man – how many men or women totally know the outcomes of very risky behaviours before they happen?

No one?

Not even Jesus could guarantee the outcome, otherwise He would not have asked the Father permission to seek another way. He was staking His very life on, literally, His death. Jesus the man would be totally broken before Jesus the God could be made evident to all.

Have you had an experience (or witnessed one) when someone sacrificed themselves because it was the right thing to do, even if they could have gotten out of the situation? Detail some thoughts.

Share your thoughts with your fellow explorers.

Day 550: The counterfeit

During the feast the governor was accustomed to release one prisoner to the crowd, whomever they wanted. At that time they had in custody a notorious prisoner named Jesus Barabbas. So after they had assembled, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Christ?" (For he knew that they had handed him over because of envy.) As he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent a message to him: "Have nothing to do with that innocent man; I have suffered greatly as a result of a dream about him today." But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor asked them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas!" Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?" They all said, "Crucify him!" He asked, "Why? What wrong has he done?" But they shouted more insistently, "Crucify him!"

(Matthew 27:15-23)

As we've discussed already, the name "Jesus" meant "God Saves." The name "Barabbas" was comprised of "Bar:" "Son", and "Abba:" "Father." "Christ" meant "Anointed one", as in "Anointed one of God to lead His people into God's Kingdom".

So, Pilate and the religious leadership offered a wicked choice: do you want "God Saves – Son of the Father", or "God Saves – Anointed One?" Make your choice now!

And they chose the counterfeit – Jesus Barabbas had the right name, but His fruit had been death (he was a known murderer). They rejected the one who brought the fruit of life.

Sometimes we must discern carefully – though different options may look similar on the surface, which one brings life, and which brings death? Which one glorifies God, and which one degrades God? These are key questions. Prayerfully, choose wisely. Avoid the counterfeit. You can tell the type of the tree by the fruit that it gives.

List choices you are familiar with (you may even have had to make yourself) in which it was very hard to discern between two options. Write them down and then write down for each why they could cause life or could cause death. Sum up by stating why you think one is the better choice over the other.

Share with your fellow explorers.

Day 551: Playing Games (continued)

When Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but that instead a riot was starting, he took some water, washed his hands before the crowd and said, "I am innocent of this man's blood. You take care of it yourselves!" In reply all the people said, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" Then he released Barabbas for them. But after he had Jesus flogged, he handed him over to be crucified.

Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the governor's residence and gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe around him, 29 and after binding a crown of thorns, they put it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand, and kneeling down before him, they mocked him: "Hail, king of the Jews!" They spat on him and took the staff and struck him repeatedly on the head. 31 When they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes back on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. (Matthew 27:24-31).

As was shared last week, the soldiers around Jesus played a cruel game, which we see further details of here – but everyone was playing a cruel game.

Pilate claimed to be innocent. However, everyone knew that it was only under Pilate's authority that an execution could take place – so regardless of what he claimed, only he could endorse a legal death, and he had all the authority to prevent one. His absconding did not relieve him of this responsibility; it was but a part of the game. His public pronouncement may have made him feel better, but he was ultimately accountable for who died and who lived.

All authority on earth – the mighty secular empire of Rome and the mighty religious empire of Judaism – was cooperating to see that the Son of God met a miserable and totally defeating end, and that they shared the credit.

The mockery of the soldiers just added to the flavour.

You may at times have felt that "this jury is rigged" – events and words have maliciously been set against you or someone you have witnessed. If you have encountered such an occasion, write it below. Jesus was experiencing that now.

Share as you feel appropriate.

Day 552: 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.