

Meditation

A number of years ago, at a different parish where I was working at the time, I was involved with a group of really wonderful people studying the scriptures for the upcoming Sunday Mass....

They were-and are-good hearted people,
kind people,
generous people, faith filled people.

One day as the class was about to begin one lady opened the session by saying to the others

“You know, I started this study because I truly wanted to be a better follower of Jesus, but what I’m learning is causing myself to ask some hard questions...”

“I know you what mean,” another lady offered:

“I’m not sure exactly why I started coming,
but I thought it was the right thing to do
and somehow I thought I would be ‘better’...
but this is making my life more difficult, not easier...”

“For instance, now I have a hard time going shopping....

I’m thinking more about what I buy and where it was made and who made it?

Were they paid a just wage?

Did they work in reasonable conditions?”

One of the few men in the class chimed in:

“These studies have made it more difficult for me to choose who I vote for”

and on and on....

I really don’t remember getting to the Scriptural topic in question that day....
but the discussion that followed was important and at least for me,
was more memorable than a few Bible facts.

I believe that the question of why we pursue our spiritual journey is a question worth considering...

Why do we study the scriptures or show up at Chapel or
do whatever it is that we do on our spiritual paths?

To make life easier?

To be a better person?

To get a reward?

In our reading today,

there are several stories of people who thought they wanted to follow Jesus...

As Luke tells the story, Jesus had set his face towards Jerusalem...

he’s determined....

Although Luke doesn’t say it here,

Jesus knew exactly what he was doing and what awaited him there...

But as often as Jesus tried to tell his disciples, they didn't get it..
they didn't understand the full consequence and
the full meaning of his teachings..
They certainly didn't foresee the crucifixion...
they still thought that since he was the Messiah
they were going to be a part of the new Kingdom of God...
which in their minds meant that Jesus would
kick the Romans out of Israel, establish a new government
with them holding positions of power and status...

But we all know that is not how Jesus saw his mission.
As each individual comes forward they say I want to follow you Jesus, but...
Jesus knows that there is no time for "but"...
he has set his face towards Jerusalem and the time is now...
While their apparent reasons for not following him immediately seem reasonable:
One says: I must bury my father, the other says: I'd like to go home and say goodbye...
Scholars believe they are not real situations
but metaphors for ways that we might all use to avoid the hard road of discipleship...
For instance:
While burying one's father seems reasonable, the fact is "if" his father has died, it would be
seven years before he could be buried. Burial practices in those days would place the body in a
tomb until all the muscle, skin, fat etc deteriorated to the point where only the bones would
remain. Then the family would gather the bones and bury them...
That process, in that climate would take 7 years to happen...
Jesus didn't have 7 years and he knew it.

Going home to say good bye wasn't the real issue either.
More than likely the man wanted to go home and
receive his family's blessing to follow Jesus...
but Jesus knew he more than likely would not get his family's blessing.
because Jesus was radical with a capital R.

His teachings regarding forgiveness and compassion and inclusion
were nonsense and blasphemous to the good law abiding Jew of his day
His teachings of unconditional love,
even love of your enemies was considered as crazy back then as it is now...

Jesus knew that the person's family probably wouldn't give their permission or their blessing...
so more than likely, that person would never come...

And speaking of loving one's enemies...
When the messengers of Jesus were snubbed in the Samaritan town..
they were dishonored.
James and John responded in the usual way:
'Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?
In other words: "You dissed us so we will smash you to smithereens!"

Interestingly, Jesus didn't deny that they could actually command fire to come down from heaven....

but He certainly rebuked them...he scolded them...he told them in no uncertain terms... his followers do not respond in such violent ways...

no shock and awe for those who wish to follow Jesus...

My oh my, how hard that is for most of us:

not to respond with violence to humiliation or disrespect....

The way of Jesus is not easy....

it is often not the culturally acceptable way....

it may not be the way that your family approves of....

It will not seem logical or reasonable or safe ...

So... do you still want to come?

Do you still want to journey with Jesus?

With all of the struggle and danger of walking this path with Jesus

why would we still say yes?

I can tell you my answer and I will in a moment...

but each of us must understand our reasons and motivations for ourselves...

I desire to walk the road with him,

because his way cuts through my fear...

It begins to loosen my self centeredness...

His challenge, his invitation:

to love lavishly,

forgive abundantly

walk gently

and speak graciously leads me to a place of deep joy,

authentic freedom and

indestructible peace

and I don't get that from doing things the same old, same old way....

That is why I walk with Jesus....

but the important question for now is: why do you?

amen.