

Choices

28 October 2018

This day begins as any other day.

Hot, dusty, the smell of the animals moving on the road, stirring up the dust, the cursing of drivers shouting, the smells of cooking, the neighbors arguing as usual – yet there is something different about this day. I hear talk about a new teacher. He can do things. He can heal. He teaches, he moves, he heals even among us.

There are many people now, many more people – I hear them, their moving stirs up the dust, the noise...they are talking...He...the Teacher himself is among them... I hear him...

Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!

They are shouting at me to shut up, to sit down...I will not!

Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!

I hear him and I know it is His voice, “Call him here!” He says.

Even in the blackness of my blindness I rush to the sound of his voice...I stumble...I get up...I’m closer to His voice...suddenly there is silence...I fall to the ground....I am at his feet.

“What do you want me to do for you?”

“Teacher, let me see again!”

This past Monday evening I returned to Tucker Prison for the first time since our Kairos walk over a week earlier. This prison ministry is an ongoing thing in which some of our volunteers visit Tucker on a weekly basis to encourage those inmates who participated in the Kairos walk to continue in their walk.

During the course of the walk we presented a series of talks about living life, living life= as it were - as a walk, a journey, with Christ. It is based on a similar program called Cursillo or The Journey with which some of us may be familiar. Cursillo means “short course” – it is a short course in Christian living. One of the talks concerns “Choices.” Well, that’s sort of an obvious

thing to say. We make choices in life. We can choose to get up in the morning. We can choose to get up on a Sunday morning or we can choose to stay in bed. We can choose to go to church or stay home and read the comics. All of our lives involve the making of choices. Indeed, we could probably say that most of life consists of making a series of choices. And again – sort of obvious, of course – those choices involve consequences – sometimes even leading to a new set of choices and directions – because once we make one choice we go down a path on which there is no turning back – we cannot roll back time and go back and make a different choice.

Before our meeting started as we were milling around I visited with one of the inmates who had been at my table – over the course of the walk we are all assigned to a particular table so we get to know those inmates at that table pretty well and they us. And in the time since the Kairos walk he had talked with another inmate – who had also participated in the walk – and as it happened encouraged him not to use illegal drugs. Apparently drugs are relatively easy to come by.

Later once the meeting started and when we had broken down into small groups for discussion it happened that both of these inmates were in the small group in which I participated. And in that group the inmate who had been tempted to use the illegal drugs told how his friend - the first inmate - had persuaded him not to. With his friend's encouragement he had not used drugs – he had made a choice, for once a good choice.

Will that inmate ever be tempted to use illegal drugs again? I'm sure he will be – certainly as long as he is in that prison that temptation will be there. And once released he will face that temptation again on the streets back in about any town you could name in Arkansas.

All that inmate is given is the present moment – he cannot go back into the past and undo what happened in the past – what he did in the past – and for an inmate that can be a tremendous weight of baggage – because many of them carry with them a history of terrible things. And he can resolve that he will do this or that in the future – and they can be wonderful and glorious resolutions of a new and better life. But all he has – all he will ever have – is

the present moment, the moment of “now.” Maybe that good decision, good choice, is the beginning of many good decisions, many good choices. Then maybe it is just a fluke. But in that one present moment he did make the right decision, the right choice. A life of entirely right decisions, right choices, leading even to sainthood begins with just one.

Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

....and followed him on the way.

Now it’s coming, you say to yourself. He’s going to stop talking about that inmate who made all those terrible choices and finally made a choice and now he’s going to talk about me. It’s coming!

And maybe it is.

As I have been involved in this ministry over the years I’ve come to realize that these inmates – these men – are not that much different from me – and you. Certainly there are some who have been truly captured by evil – which I do not understand or even comprehend – or some with some serious mental imbalances who some would say would be better treated for serious mental illnesses rather than imprisoned – but most are just men. Men who’ve made poor choices certainly, men who never learned to control their temper maybe, men who’ve succumbed to drugs or other addictions – but basically they are just men. I’ve made poor choices at times, I’ve lost my temper at times...I’ve gotten mad sometimes at people. And I would not want anyone to have read my mind at certain times. I embarrass even myself sometimes with the thoughts I have about certain of our public figures from time to time.

Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

And followed him on the way.

Maybe there are all sorts of things we could call “blindness” – a failure to see our lives as they could be – as we would want them to be – as God wants us to be. For the beggar, the man lying in the dusty street in Jericho, it was his blindness, his physical blindness. Maybe for the inmate it is for the high of a

drug that replaces the dreadfulness maybe even ordinariness of life with physical feelings of euphoria. Maybe it is just a sense of questioning about the worth or purpose of living. Is there anyone who really cares about us, our existence, our purpose in life?

And if any of this would describe me – and I think from time to time it has, yes, I would want to jump up and encounter someone – a teacher - who could show me the way, who could lead me to healing.

Just as this blind man did.

But the healing involves much more than just jumping up and approaching the teacher – for that is only a recognition that there is blindness.

It also involves following Him on the way – a life lived in joyful relationship with Him. And following Him on the way involves living in joyful relationship with others who follow the Way, His Way. Other good people – who are imperfect certainly – like all of us are – but good people. We do not have to go it alone – indeed He wants us to go in fellowship with others.

And if I were to list all the adventures and challenges, good times and not so good times, that following the Way will involve I could go on all day. But maybe a few – and in no particular order or importance – because all are important – helping with a meal for the respite group, answering the phone on Tuesdays, counting the money on Monday morning, trying to find the right tool to fix the heating system with my toolbox on the floor, praying for others as part of the DOK, proofreading the service bulletin for Sunday, playing the best organ in the state of Arkansas with verve and vigor, helping someone who needs a coat select one to keep him warm, to teach the children, to write a check cheerfully so that the church can pay its utilities or the bank note and we can keep our doors open, to memorize all the lines in the play even as we wish T.S. Eliot could have put a little more rhyming in his poem so we could remember our lines easier...

Loving God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and charity, and, so that we may obtain what you promise, make us love what you command; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.