

...to walk just as He walked. A sermon preached at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC, October 9, 2016 by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons; GENESIS 17:1-8

I JOHN 2:3-6

JOHN 15:1-11

The Bible often describes our life as a Christian as a walk.

Enoch walked with God (Gen. 5:24)

Noah walked with God (Gen 6:9)

God says to Abraham in Genesis 17:1 **-Walk before me and be blameless**

In one of his I am's Jesus says, **I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (Jn 8:12)**

Then that post Resurrection story of the walk to Emmaus (Luke 24) at the end of the day's journey, Jesus is invited to break bread in the home of his walking companions and that action, the two companions recognize Jesus for who he is.

Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road.

Walking as Jesus walked – what a wonderfully evocative and accurate picture of living the Christian life.

To walk as Jesus walked is just that.

It is not a race
 It is a slow and steady journey
 You are meant to see more, hear more as you
 walk – in a way you cannot if you travel swiftly –
 looking only at the next stop
 It is a journey meant to last a lifetime
 On some days and in some seasons. It will feel like
 we are walking backwards or stuck for every two
 steps we move forward.

Sometimes the path will not be an easy one
 Sometimes we shall stumble or trip
 We may well at a time fall flat on our face
 Sometimes emotional or physical weariness will
 threaten to overwhelm us.

Will we at times want to quit and pull off the
 path or the journey with Jesus? – yes!

It is many years since I read John
 Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, initially published in
 1678.

The first time I had to read it as part of an
 introductory English class – and I did not like the
 book.

I could not grasp the imagery and the language was
 I thought unnecessary difficult.

The second, third and in all subsequent readings I
 have gotten over my pique about the language
 And I came to appreciate the imagery and allegory
 of the story.

While the general decline of religious piety has caused popular interest in the book to wane, I still believe it is a good read!

The characters and the settings that the main character 'Pilgrim' meets on his walk or journey to the Heavenly City are still very much with us – Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Mr. Legality, Faith, Hopeful and Doubting Castle.

So what counsel is this section of John's letter offering to his readers – then and now?

Walking as he [Jesus] walked means just that.

John is very concerned that the matters and issues raised in his letter so far not just be noted and filed

That is, to respond to John's writing by saying "good text" valid point is not good enough.

John does not want his readers then and now to say something akin to what is said to Paul as he speaks about Jesus at the Areopagus (Acts 17) **we will hear you again about this.**

What Paul said in Acts 17

What John is saying here in his letter are matters that are not up for indefinite discussion.

The gospel is not some academic, removed from real life set of ideas, rules or idle chit chat.

The gospel is nothing less than life changing, right priority and fresh perspective living!

How so?

*Walking as Jesus walked means we know the Lord
Jesus Christ*

John does not say anywhere in the letter that we are to know certain or a select number of things only ABOUT Jesus.

In knowing about Jesus that does not mean we are to have a general superficial acquaintance with Jesus

Rather, there is to be an intimacy about it

It is to be a personal acquaintance that is to touch every part and area of our lives.

For example

It means that by the power of the Spirit, we endeavor to *speak as Jesus spoke*.

Not just on odd days, but every day.

Not just to the people who we like, but also to the people who challenge our patience, understanding, grace, forgiveness.

Jesus did speak words of correction and discipline.

His anger when he expressed it was a righteous anger

Over and again, Jesus' words reflect peace, compassion, mercy, care and certainly grace — God's grace. Jesus' words defused and calmed situations.

Jesus' words healed

His words always put the needs of others above his own.

The childhood rhyme that my mother taught me after I was verbally bullied and humiliated at

school by peers – sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me – is a lie. Well intentioned, but a lie – for words do hurt!!

Words do demean and whittle away at our sense of self-worth

Once spoken, words cannot be taken back.

So in walking as Jesus walked, we need to think very carefully before we open our mouths,

However necessary we may feel we need to forthrightly express our viewpoint or opinion.

Firm correction, tinged with gentleness is almost always better than confrontational anger and temper.

To walk as Jesus walked means that by the power and help of the Holy Spirit, *we see as Jesus saw.*

Never did Jesus make snap judgements about peoples' actions and behaviours

Jesus had the ability to look beyond the surface.

To look beyond the immediate context and circumstances and see peoples' humanity and frailty.

Jesus saw the broken hearted shame of the prostitute in Luke 7(35-50)

Jesus saw beyond the repulsiveness of the disease of leprosy to the loneliness and the sense of isolation the diseased caused its sufferers

Would that each of us who profess to follow Jesus were able to steadfastly display such empathy, compassion, non-judgmental listening and gracious spaciousness all the time – Especially in those situations and with those people who we are tempted to dismiss as just difficult, burdensome, nuisances.

I have learned, often the hard way, that many such people act the way they do not just to be nuisances and difficult,
But out of fear, anxiety, loneliness, unhealed hurts and memories
What if we began to see those difficult, burdensome nuisances as people for whom Jesus died, as much as he died for you and me?
What if we were to begin “to see” all people – including our nuisance people as worthy of God’s love, as much as you and I are
I wonder how our perception of others might change.

As to difficult times and circumstances in our lives,

Circumstances that challenge our very beings?

Though it is really hard to do all the time, I wonder what would happen if by the power of God’s Holy Spirit,

We were to see these not as just difficult and unfair, unnecessary and unwanted times, but as opportunities to appreciate the depth of God’s love

And grace toward each of us.

I think often of that anonymous prayer
written by a Confederate soldier.

You know it – yes

A Christian Confederate Soldier's Prayer
(Anon - alleged to have been found on a CSA casualty at
the Devil's Den, Gettysburg)

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve.

I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.

I asked for health, that I might do greater things.

I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.

I asked for riches, that I might be happy.

I was given poverty, that I might be wise.

I asked for power that I might have the praise of men.

I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.

I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life.

I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.

I got nothing that I asked for but got everything I had
hoped for.

Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were
answered.

I am, among all people, most richly blessed.

That is such an accurate description of walking as
Jesus walked in the matter of seeing what Jesus
saw.

Walking as Jesus walked I believe also means
that by the power and help of the Holy Spirit, we
begin to see the world as Jesus saw the world.

John will develop this idea later chapter 2 of his letter

¹⁵Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; ¹⁶for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷And the world and its desire^a are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever.

Again as we have already seen, John is no nonsense. Nothing fluffy or light or unclear here.

We will return to this in more detail when we get to these verses.

Suffice to say that even at this point, we have seen in the letter, John is saying – Jesus’ priorities and givens and not the world’s

To Jesus, service to others is key.

People and relationships are key

These are certainly not the way of the world – where self, me, mine is seen as central

And the desire for more stuff is a guiding principle. “He who dies with the most toys, wins!!” -bumper stickers or posters!!

Okay, but how do we endeavor to practice this is a fresh and consistent way?

Well,

John in the letter’s verses Paul read suggests a way.

Abide in him

In both the letter and his gospel, John speaks a lot about the importance of ABIDING in Jesus.

In ordinary conversation, we do not use very often the verb “abide” – but we do use words and phrases like “live in”, make your home in, and join with me.

Those more familiar phrases to our ears then can be substituted if you think the word abides is too churchy.

If you read the Gospel lesson Paul read, and do that with the word abide, you have a most clear word picture of what abiding in Jesus is all about.

Eugene Peterson in the Message does this so very well.

Permit me to read just the first four verses of chapter 15 from The Message.

15 ¹⁻³“I am the Real Vine and my Father is the Farmer. He cuts off every branch of me that doesn’t bear grapes. And every branch that is grape-bearing he prunes back so it will bear even more. You are already pruned back by the message I have spoken.

4“Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can’t bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can’t bear fruit unless you are joined with me.

This is a particularly evocative ‘ I am’ for me, for I grew up as you know in the Niagara area of Ontario.

An area that always had vineyards – long before the popularity of wine in peoples’ palates.

And in Welland, my home town, every family from Italy, and we had many families who settled in Welland, had vines in their backyard so they could make homemade wine.

So I do not have to stretch my imagination to “see” the point Jesus is making.

Branches only live because of the vines to which they are attached

No vines=no branches=and most certainly no grapes or fruits

All of the nourishment, energy, life force comes from the vines.

The point Jesus is making – we just cannot model his ways, do the things he asks us to do, invites us to do, without drawing from and being dependent upon Him.

And part of the way we monitor and gauge whether we are continually drawing from Jesus is by asking some questions of ourselves.

Not looking at others and what they are or are not doing

But looking within at ourselves

➤ What does Jesus mean to me?

- Where is Jesus in my priority list
- Is Jesus in my life more than just going to church, singing and giving some money?
- Can I point to actions, things in my life that show I really do know Jesu and I want to know him better

Hear me; the facts about Jesus are important.

For they give context to Jesus' preaching, teaching and healing

But to *walk as Jesus walked* – which is John's counsel then and now – means to go deeper,

Get closer

Humble yourself before the Lord

And to give thanks always for God's first action in Jesus Christ.

AMEN