

In the Way of Jesus

Wondering

Wondering...I've been doing a lot of it this week. I've been wondering about many things. Let me tell you about a few of my wonderments.

- I've found myself thinking about you. As we meet more regularly and find our own pattern of worship, I'm grateful that each of you comes readily to my mind's eye. I enjoy seeing different ones of you at work...on your way to the post office, getting pizza...having lunch.
- Throughout the week, I've been revisiting scheduled appointments and happenstance encounters, pondering conversations both written and spoken, expected and unexpected.
- I've been wondering about you, wondering about me and I've been wondering about all of us – our world, our nation, our community and our Emmaus Road Fellowship!

Wondering... I like the word... because it allows for full range of possible thoughts and feelings. Sometimes it's a pleasant way of being– like a rich blend of silent prayer and cognitive consideration. It reminds me of a beautiful Quaker expression that speaks of “holding another or an unfolding circumstance in the Light of Christ. At other times, I struggle as I wonder, finding myself uncomfortable with edgy uncertainty and raw hints of anxiety.

This morning I'm still *wondering*... curious to know what it is that you're engaged with. What thoughts keep making bringing themselves to your attention? What are you anticipating with joy; what are you bearing with feelings of dread? We've enjoyed our hour of study and discussion together, now we are together in worship. I still find myself wanting to ask, what's stirring within you? What things did you set aside before you came this morning? What things are with you, on the “back burner” for the moment, yet just waiting for you to step outside of the Senior Center?What might it be that is vying for your attentions right this very minute, not willing or accepting of being to put “on hold?”

Some of the places which my energies have been drawn toward this week – (no value on importance noted by their order.) My thoughts have often been with:

1. The birth and birth pangs of our Emmaus Road Fellowship.
2. The stressors and blessings of life on the farm at harvest season.
3. Particular poignant moments and usual responsibilities of my work at Swiss Village
4. And then of course...presidential elections and Wall Street!

What about you? What's at work in your hearts and minds? Speak them out loud if you choose.

As we recognize the joys and sorrows; delights and disappointments which are part of each of our lives may this time of reflection and meditation allow us to settle and center ourselves again on the Jesus, the Way.

In The Way of Jesus

Our scripture readings for today offer us again a glimpse into the lives of people. Certainly peoples of very differing times and places- the people of Israel in the wilderness; the church at Philippi – yet, in spite of our many differences they are persons and communities of people strangely familiar they to us. In these folks we recognize a strong family resemblance -especially when it comes to dealing with one another on a daily basis!

First, a glance into the wilderness to Moses and the Israelites. Manna continues to fall every morning. Quail covers the camp each evening, but now there is a question about water. The people find themselves overwhelmed with fear. What if ample water isn't to be found? Beyond that, an even greater question, *"Is the Lord among us or not?"*

How does that question hit you this morning? The people cried out, "Is the Lord among us or not?" What a heart-rending plea!

Next, we stand alongside the community of believers at Philippi. Paul writes with great tenderness to his friends in Philippi. He is grateful for their openness to the Gospel of Christ and acknowledges the challenges they face. He speaks of the suffering that seems to be part of their experience, which he well understands as he writes from his prison cell. The believers at Philippi are encouraged to "work out their salvation with fear and trembling." What an invitation...to a way of life of which "fear and trembling" is the way toward wholeness?

Skipping ahead a couple of thousand years, brings us to our gathering today. As a people, we, too, are like the wilderness people, often spreading fear like fire through our communities. What if??? What if...is that often a question that stops shy of our real question? The question that lies in half hibernation within us? The question ... "what if God has forsaken us?"

Like Paul's beloved Philippians, as persons making our way in community we often find ourselves at risk to hunker down, wishing to avoid conflict and struggle. We seek refuge from anything that would invite us to a place of "fear and trembling!" - We avoid this

territory - even if the journey would bring us to a new kind of life – that is salvation – healing, alongside of our brokenness and vulnerabilities.

In the midst of our uncertainties, do we allow ourselves to admit our very deepest questions? For the people in the wilderness, it seems that the question wasn't really about water...it was about God! I may wonder about many things. I may be afraid and express that through much grumbling and complaining about the state of affairs, but could it be that my question too, really is, "God, are you with me or not?"

I wonder, what if we would honor the questions that grip us at the core of our being, not only the ones simply on the fringes of it. Could it be that out of this authentic place – a place of fear and trembling – that we begin to hear anew... breathe anew, speak anew, love anew, live anew? Could it be that as we give ourselves with utmost vulnerability – (another way to describe the emotional feeling of fear and the physical expression that comes through trembling) to the way of Jesus– that faint, familiar strains may begin to find their way from locked places deep within us?

Listen for the welcome in the words of Jesus to little children – even the one within you.. *Embrace* his acceptance of otherwise untouchable persons – as we recognize that person deep within us. *Accept* his way of love which never failed or faltered – for yourself, and offer it to others. *Draw strength* from the companionship of Jesus along the road – your very own life's journey. *Savor* the gentle washing of his followers feet – your feet. *Share* the cup and the bread in his memory – in a community of fellow sojourners. *Remember* that nothing is able to separate us from the love of God, in Jesus - nothing. Listen remember...try not to forget.

On Thursday afternoon, one of our elderly Swiss Village residents made his way to the residential nurse. He wasn't able to communicate as usual. Words wouldn't come and his breathing was labored. I joined him as he waited at the nurse's station. The nurse was at work taking vitals, contacting family and checking with the physician's office. I sat beside him with my hand on his arm, hoping to offer a bit of comfort in what had to be a frightening experience. As we were waiting, suddenly he startled me. (No, he didn't die, but I wasn't sure at first.) He leaned toward me and laid his head on my shoulder. It was a tender moment ... a holy moment, the Spirit of Christ so evidently present with us. Much more challenging, for me however, are the many other – less tender times. May I, may we, then, also remember that Christ is present even when events are routine, laborious, inglorious and plain.

In order to engage in the daily-ness of life, as followers of Jesus it takes intention, it takes practice. I need a cheerleader. I need encouragement. I need you! The reading from Philippians speaks to me in this way. These words of Paul offer a steady reminder that

we, too, can aspire to be followers with the “mind of Christ” each and every day, in all things.

Paul encourages, “Live you life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

- Since there is encouragement in Christ, that is; since Jesus really comes alongside...we're not alone – ever
- Since you have the strength which comes from love – accept it, exercise it, live in celebration of this energizing and grounding gift.
- Since you have each other – fellowship which shares the Spirit's life – give thanks for each other, trust each other, steady each other and dream with each other.
- Since you have experienced compassion, warm affection and acts of mercy – don't hold back, don't be stingy! Or nearly so tentative and guarded!

Yes, there may be real question about the next oasis and the hope of water. Yes, there will most likely be fear and trembling (phobia & trauma) as we seek to be followers of Jesus. Remember, don't forget... the spirit of Christ won't be scared off or leave us to deal with matters alone. So may we – with joy and anticipation - join in that which God wills. May we give all that we have -for God is at work, actively and wholeheartedly in each and everyone of us!

Let's keep wondering, let's admit to the challenges that life presents to us, but more than ever, let's remember

- Unlimited love is our companion
- We are strengthened by Christ in spite of what we know as our weakness
- We can offer this way of Jesus to one another and the world!
- Best of all this is not only to God's glory but for God's “good pleasure!”

AMEN