

Rev. Nancy Wakely - September 13th, 2015

About twelve years ago our daughter Caity and I got to take a once in a life time trip to Italy. We picked up a rental car in Florence, finally found the highway, and took off. I was driving and finally realized that the people there were not serious about the speed limit. Caity spent the first hour of the trip with her hands over her eyes screaming, “Morte! Morte!”, while I laughed and said, “Can you believe there are actually cars that are passing us?!”

Roundabouts were a big problem. These weren't just the little two lane street roundabouts we see here. They were right in the middle of highways and were enormous. There were signs all around them pointing in different directions leading off to the towns and villages we wanted to go to but who knew where to jump off? On one we kept going around and around and I had to tell Caity to quit yelling, “Morte”, take her hands off her eyes, and look at the signs...keep an eye on the road.

We were traveling roads and streets but they were not the familiar kind. It gave us a new perspective on what we thought of us as the right way for roads to look and the way they should be traveled.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus said to his group of friends and followers, “Who do people say that I am”? They spoke to him about comparisons to past prophets. But then he asks them, those who lived with him day in and day out, “Who do YOU say that I am”? One writer said that he liked to imagine dead silence following that question. They'd never known anyone like Jesus who moved their faith experience beyond the prophets who came before him. And finally Peter said, “You are the Messiah”. And at that moment, says this writer, they moved beyond just being a band of friends and followers into the life of discipleship. A life of realization that Jesus was speaking about what spoke to the heart of God and therefore, to his heart as well. This was a road and destination that was going to be different. They needed to move beyond the familiar, look at the signs, and think long and hard about where they were going and what was ahead. They had to fully invest themselves in giving their hearts and at times, having their hearts broken. Not only talking the talk but walking the walk...with Him...every step of the way.

Marcus Borg said, “For those of us who grew up in the church, believing in Jesus was important. For me, what that phrase used to mean was 'believing things about Jesus'. But now I see that believing in Jesus means something very different from that. The word “believe” did not originally mean believing a set of doctrines or teachings from the church; in both Greek and

Latin its roots mean 'to give one's heart to'. Believing, therefore, does not consist of giving one's mental assent to something, but involves a much deeper level of one's self.”

So what might be a different perspective or a way of traveling the road. What does a life of discipleship mean for us in the here and now. I think what we believe about being a disciple of Jesus and how we act on that belief reflects who we are in the world. We don't have to stand on a street corner and profess our faith. For that matter, we don't have to profess our faith in the hallways of our work places. We don't have to wear a symbol of the cross around our necks or declare that one political party or another is more righteous.

What we can do is live out our discipleship in small ways. In the way that we treat other people, in how we treat the most helpless in our society, and how we treat the gift of our earth.

For me, and this is just a personal reflection, it is also about what breaks your heart even when you are helpless or unable to do anything about it. It is about being moved to tears even when those around you say that it is not technically your responsibility. It is about the things that broke the heart of Jesus, moved him to tears, and made him angry. Being a disciple does not mean that we walk the path with Jesus through the church year and the commemoration of the events of his life. It means that we have given our hearts.

Jesus did not invoke the name of his Father for prestige, or power, or to boost his numbers in the polls. He talked about the path that was spoken about by the prophets. A path that was a reflection of God's love for us...his hopes and his dreams for us.

He talked repeatedly about the path that was good and true and about not just giving lip service to a set of beliefs.

And here we are, in this time of political turmoil in our country with so many invoking the name of Jesus but in every other thing that they do and say, their hearts have not been broken. Their hearts have not been touched by those who suffer because perhaps, they want to use their power to oppress the powerless rather than empower them. They give lip service to belief but do not engage in discipleship. They talk a good talk, just like the religious leaders of Jesus' day and fail to walk the path that God set out for them.

In the words of a song from my childhood:

O to be like Thee! O to be like Thee!
Blessed Redeemer, pure as thou art;
Come in thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness;
Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart.

And so, at the end of the road for each of us, if someone asks who we were in this life, let it be that our belief in the way of Jesus was more than just words and more than just rituals.

May it be said that we tried to live with the image of Jesus stamped deep on our hearts, that our hearts are still broken for the things that broke the heart of Jesus. That we did not just profess his name but lived our lives as his disciples. That we uncovered our eyes, looked at the suffering around us, and then walked the path with him.