

Reflection for Pentecost 6 by Rev'd Canon Michael Last

This is a time of year when many go on holiday and that involves travelling. Whatever method of travel is being used you need to know the route - how to get from A to B. I suspect that for people these days, travelling by car, that involves using a SatNav which tells you not only the route but also where you are.

If, though, you are still using a paper map the first thing you must do is establish where you are on that map. If you are like me you open the map, and at times the more you look at it the more confused you become. Am I here or over there? It is only having established your location that you can begin to move forward.

Generally, I am quite good with maps and direction but, I remember a number of years ago being in location that left me completely confused – Jerusalem: not the old walled city but modern west Jerusalem. The problem was that the street names were in Hebrew - that was issue one. The second was that they had helpfully transliterated the Hebrew, which should have helped, but it only led to further confusion because it was not the same person who did the transliteration for the street signs and the maps, the names often being totally different. Couple that with local driving habits - the traffic behind you using the horn nearly as much as accelerator, and one quickly got lost and confused.

In the second half of that gospel reading this morning, Jesus is pointing out the way each of us is in a very real way is lost, often muddling through life struggling to make sense of where we are and which direction we are going in. The more we think about it, very often, the more lost and confused we become. Or as Jesus puts it: - *“Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants;”* Or as an alternative translation puts it *“Father, Lord of heaven and earth! I thank you because you have shown to the unlearned what you have hidden from the wise and learned.*

What Jesus is emphasizing is the way that the more we think we can find our own way, the more we in fact struggle in our own strength to find God. The reality is we often get lost.

Think about trying to find out where you are on a map. You look for particular features - key buildings, hills, rivers. When it comes to finding our way back to God and making real sense of life, Jesus is saying there is only one feature that stands out and points us in the right direction and that is Jesus himself.

As Matthew records it *“No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”*

In John's gospel we get similar picture in one of the I am sayings *“I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me.”*

The only way to find our way back to God is not through our own efforts, as good as they might be but through Jesus - not only as a sign post pointing the direction but also the very way itself through his death on the cross and his resurrection - opening up for us that new and living way back to God.

If Jesus is the key, the way back to God, the way to understand the map, that reality is not something we should keep secret and hidden away. Having made the great assertions that he is the only way back to God. Jesus goes on to give a wonderful invitation to everyone.

'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Come to me all who are tired from carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Not only are we so often lost struggling to make sense of life, but also the burden of life weights us down, drags us down. Jesus wants to lift that burden. He wants us to find not only the way back to God but also to gain a new perspective on life a perspective that involves following him.

John Bunyan, in his book "Pilgrims Progress" written many years ago, describes the way Pilgrim struggles along with a great burden on his back - a burden he cannot remove. Then he comes to the cross and as he does so, that burden slips off and he is free of it. His journey, however, does not stop at the cross, rather it goes on, but now he sees things differently and follows a new path.

In the first edition of the Olney Hymns published in 1779, a collection of hymns written by William Cowper and John Newton, Newton's famous hymn "Amazing Grace" appears and is prefaced with these words - Faith's Review and Expectation. Look carefully at the words of the hymn and you see that it tells Newton's own life story, from a slave ship captain feared by his crew, through an almost fatal Atlantic storm in which he feels totally lost and helpless, then onto a life changing faith.

*Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found
was blind, but now I see.*

For John Newton, as for Pilgrim in Pilgrim's Progress, that was only the beginning. Newton not only becoming a clergyman but a founder of the Clapham Sect, using his knowledge of the slave trade and becoming an ally of others campaigning to abolish the slave trade.

What does this say and mean for each of us?

1. It is a reminder that so often we need to accept that we are lost, that the map does not make sense to us.
2. We need to recognize and remind ourselves that Jesus is the Way the Truth and the Life. (Think back to the Baptism service and what is acknowledged during that liturgy).
3. We need to accept that invitation held out to us by Jesus. An invitation that we do not deserve or have a right to ask for, but one that is offered to us through God's grace and love. *"Come to me, all of you who are tired ... and I will give you rest."*
4. When we do accept the rest, we find in Jesus we start to see things very differently. The burdens we are carrying becomes easier to bear. New challenges lie ahead – but challenges now faced in the power of Christ and the strength of the Holy Spirit.

"Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit; and you will find rest."