



Day twenty-nine

For the next 40 days we are offering us all a challenge to consider 40 things that are sucking the life out of us. The challenge is to examine these and through confronting God's word, his Spirit, and his community of faith as we seek to be filled with his life and his love again. At the conclusion of each challenge there will be an opportunity to engage about this with another person and/or the larger community.

Today the thing we are asking us to explore giving up is:

the quick fix

Confronting the text

A Psalm of David.

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.*

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me*

*all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.*

¹ The Lord appointed seventy and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ² He said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³ Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves . . . ¹⁷ The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!' (Luke 10:1-3; 17).

Confronting my self with God

Though this Lenten meditation is being shared with you on the 30th of March I am writing it on the 17th which is St Patrick's Day and has sent my heart on the idea of a journey; a decidedly Irish idea.

The thought of a quick fix would be anathema to Irish/Celtic spirituality.

Life is seen rather as a long journey
spent listening to Christ.

Consider the journey that Christ is leading you in right now.

If life is such a journey, what images do we hold of Christ our traveling companion?

And perhaps more importantly, how do we know what it means to walk with him?

What is it *like* to walk with Jesus?

Consider this as less an exercise in imagination as it is an encouragement to view God as a Person who walks with us.

The 12th century Benedictine Monk,, Anselm of Canterbury said,
"God is that being who is greater than all we can imagine."

But God is a Person, and can be known.

The Apostle Paul wrote that now we "see" through a glass dimly, one day we shall see face to face, (1 Cor 13:12).

But we do SEE NOW. We don't *have to* wait for that "one day," we can grow a deep soul understanding of God and God with us in the here and now.

In Luke 10, Jesus sends the apostles and those who were traveling with him on a journey. Afterwards . . . ¹⁷ *The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!'*

This text speaks of something called *peregrinatio* in Celtic spirituality. The word is practically untranslatable in English. But it is related to journeying.

Like most Irish concepts it is best illustrated in a story.

Three Irishman drifted over the sea for seven days in a boat without oars. They came ashore in Cornwall where they were brought to the court of the King. When the king asked them where they were going, they answered that they, "Stole away because we wanted for the love of God to be on pilgrimage, we cared not where."

Jesus sent the seventy into the countryside to the towns where he would go. They went; they cared not where they were going for Christ. *Penegrinatio*.

A *peregrinatio* isn't a quick fix to be undertaken for a specific end or goal, but a "journey" (I put that in "air quotes" because it doesn't have to be a "physical journey") for Christ. The pilgrim isn't trying to reach a certain shrine or holy place, they aren't going so they might return someday with a sense of "mission accomplished." They are embarking on a passionate inner journey for the love of God.

This is something we would do well to apprehend; too often we believe we will "arrive," or, more pejoratively our journey will bring us personal gain. We are Frodo and Sam on the way to Mount Doom, hoping to return to the Shire, or Arthur, seeking the Holy Grail; we are looking for happiness, serenity; even financial gain. But what do you gain in a love relationship? Do you ever "arrive?"

What if the "gain" of the journey *is* the journey?

The seventy didn't go out like first century Amway salesmen. They weren't thinking of what they'd get, they went because their Lord called them to go; the powerful and sovereign one, who is in control of all that can overwhelm, went with them.

Part of what we are about is rejecting the quick fix so we can stop and listen. The path of our journey then is
heard in prayer,
informed by scripture
and authenticated in community.

In the Bible the word “pray” comes from the marriage of two words which mean communicating a good wish to someone, in this case God.

Because we believe that God is the first mover and that he is *for us*, before even we are for us, this good wish doesn’t start with us, but with Jesus. I find so much peace in Jesus’ statement in John 17:20 . . . “*My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.*”

The “them” is the disciples.
The “those who will believe through them” is you and me.

Consider that.

Before we ever were Jesus prayed for us.

Not that we were pre-existent, we didn’t sit up in heaven like it was some great waiting room, nor are we reincarnated. But before we ever were, before we even opened our mouths in prayer Jesus prayed for us.

I’m not a very good on my knees, hands folded, eyes closed, almighty God I supplicate to you this day” pray-er.

I am a much better OK God we’re in this together can I hand you that wrench, can you tell me where to put that word, what have I missed?” pray-er.

I don’t do flowery language real good.

I hear God better in the midst of work, in doing, than silence.

I hear God better in the journey, in the action, than just in church.

That’s not to say I’m *never* silent before God, of course I am, sometimes the *only* way God can get something through this thick skull is to sit me down.

I just seem to hear better in doing.

We learn to pray by dumping the quick fix in the trash and praying, by

opening every minute of our lives to God. This is what is often called the “offices of prayer;” morning and evening prayer, lauds and others, rich traditions which are found in many churches.

In the Celtic tradition, these offices of prayer are wonderfully *earthy*.

There are prayers for the beginning of the day; accompanied by splashing of three handfuls of water on the face: one for the Father, one for the Son and one for the Holy Spirit.

There are prayers for the milking of the cow, the coming of winter and the glorious spring, even the putting out, or “smoothing” of the fire, a word which by the way means “smothering,” and is where we get the word for smores . . . ya gotta love that . . . at night the woman smoothing the fire under peat, or moss, which would keep the embers until morning, would sing . . .

The sacred three,
to save, to shield,
to surround,
the hearth,
the house,
the household this eve,
this night,
Oh! this night,
and every night,
each single night. Amen.

These offices of prayers slow us down, they help us grow in gratitude, they connect head and heart, soul, and mind. As we pray them, they draw us face to face with the presence of Christ. They provide boundaries, fences, hedges around our entire day; assisting us in remembering that there are no sacred and secular divides. God is in all of it. They encourage us to gratefully acknowledge joys and temptations, pain, and the longing of each part of the day.

Life isn't a quick fix, life is a peregrinatio; a journey with God no matter where he leads. That isn't easy. If we are truly following Christ, we are following the One who had no where to lay his head, (Matt. 8:20). The journey with Christ is costly; it doesn't necessarily follow any clear-cut path and doesn't have an end, for it is an interior journey.

Listening to God's people

Slow down.

Listen.

Breathe.