

Thought For The Day

Monday 1st June 2020

In the old days today would have been Whit Monday and would be a Bank Holiday. (Sadly we have lost the emphasis on Whitsuntide in our society. Not all change is good change!) It's a special day for me because, 52 years ago at a youth weekend at Cliff College in Derbyshire, I gave my heart and life to Jesus. It was, to say the least, an emotional and life changing moment.

Reflecting that it has been 52 years on this journey of faith reminds me of a book by Eugene Peterson, the pastor who brought us the wonderful 'Message' paraphrase of the bible. The book is called "A long obedience in the same direction". The clue is in the title. Peterson reminds us that in a world where everything moves at breakneck speed and we want everything instantly, (order it now and have it delivered within 24 hours) following Jesus and building a relationship with Him is a long term undertaking. Accepting Jesus as Saviour and Lord doesn't make us instantly perfect, rather it's just the beginning of God's work in us.

Peterson talks of two biblical descriptions for people of faith which sit against the frantic impatience of the world. The words are *disciple* and *pilgrim*. 'Disciple' means a learner, not in the academic sense of absorbing knowledge, but as an apprentice learning the ways and skills of the master. 'Pilgrim' tells us we are on a journey, we spend our time going somewhere, following the one who said "I am the way". Both of these words speak of something which takes time and cannot be rushed.

Describing this as 'a long obedience' makes it sound like a tedious and onerous commitment. But that is far from the truth. As Peterson writes "Obedience is not a stodgy plodding in the ruts of religion, it is a hopeful race towards God's promises." The life of faith, following Jesus, is an adventure. Every day we put our faith, hope and love on the line. We trust in a God who is invisible, omnipotent and whose ways are often beyond our understanding. He is not a tame God, under our control. He takes us to places we would prefer not to go. He encourages us to live by standards that are radically different to those around us. Peterson describes this as 'hazardous work' and it truly is an adventure, full of risk. Of course we know that we have a God who is well able to see us through whatever we face and that we can never be separated from His great love for us. But it's still not an easy journey we are on. The rewards though are spectacular; a life of knowing God, experiencing the peace and joy that His presence brings, living a life with meaning and purpose. Life which will never end.

There is a challenge here for all of us as we ask ourselves, "How are we getting along on our pilgrim journey?" Have we stopped beside the way? Settling, as Peterson puts it, "for ritually obeying a few commandments that are congenial to our temperament and convenient to our standard of living", stuck in the ruts of religion, living a life which is safe and unchallenging, worthy but unsatisfying and horribly dull. Or are we on an adventure with God, open and willing to be lead by the Spirit into whatever God has planned for us?

The writer to the Hebrews spends some time recounting the great adventures of faith of God's heroes in the past (ch 11) and then says; "Let's get involved in this adventure too. Strip off anything that stops you from receiving God's best and journey with perseverance on the path of adventure the Father has marked out for you". Heb 12:1,2 (Langridge translation!) You won't regret it, I promise you. I have 52 years of experience.

John Langridge

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