

II Corinthians 5:6-10-14-17

walking by faith

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Walking a pilgrimage last year and two years before that, I came to learn a phrase that has stayed with me. Pilgrims say to one another: "The Camino provides." If someone is particularly fearful about where to stay or whether there will be provisions once you arrive, "the Camino provides" is the response. This is not to be snarky - like it sounds - but the opposite: to offer confidence that releases your fears. If one is fretting about blisters or other ailments, the same confident phrase is given. "The Camino provides" is the universal language that binds together thousands of pilgrims. Each day, with my companions, I would put my belongings on my back and start walking at dawn not knowing where I would stay, what I would eat or who I would meet. Yet, as the days went by a strange confidence began to grow in me that I would in fact have a place to sleep, food to eat and people to meet. The experience taught me to trust the words of Julian of Norwich, "all shall be well."

On the day I fell and injured my knee, I was told not to worry - the Camino will provide. Many of you know this story. I can't say I completely let go of my worry; the pain certainly did not go away but I did find a compression sleeve for my knee and the next day I kept walking to the next village. Lo and behold - the owner of the small hostel where we stayed turned out to be a physical therapist or at least have the knowledge of one. He treated my knee, wrapped it with kinesthetic tape and sent me on my way with the assurance that in three days it will be fine. Pepe was right; I was fine. In fact, more than fine - a bit more fear was gone and much more trust was growing within me. My heart expanded.

Still, since I'm a Christian and not a particularly new agey one, I was more than a little skeptical of this phrase. And honestly on some days my eyebrow remains raised in disbelief. After all the Camino is not God and I don't belong to an international Cult Group. But then it dawned on me that this phrase is precisely the equivalent of what Saint Paul means by living by faith - faith in the God who provides for all our needs at all times. To say the Camino provides is a different way of saying let go of your fears, release your worry, trust the God who loves you to provides for you. Friederick Buechner says, "Faith is stepping out into the unknown with nothing to guide us but a hand just beyond our grasp."

This I believe is what Saint Paul means when he says of himself and his fellow apostles: we walk by faith and not by sight. It is no accident that Paul uses the word "walk" to refer to the Christian life. Parapeteo is the Greek word that suggests this life we are living - by faith - is a life long process of walking, not literally, of course, but there is a forward motion to the Christian life from baptism toward our last day when our baptism is made complete in death, and, as Paul says, "we come before the judgement seat of Christ" and all our deeds are exposed in Christ merciful light.

Each day is an occasion to trust our lives wholly into the care of God who loves us and whose Spirit is at work within us, transforming us into the likeness of Christ.

In John's gospel, Jesus describes himself as the Way - along with the Truth and the Life - and long before the follower of Jesus were known as Christians they were known simply as Followers of The Way.

When Saint Paul says we walk by faith and not by sight, he is pointing to a way of life that is utterly dependent upon what cannot be seen - absolute confidence in the provisions of God. Such confidence is faith - and it is the antidote to fear and worry. Faith is both gift and practice. Given by the grace of God it can wither away without practice. Like every other practice, the more we walk by faith - trust our lives wholly to God - the more our capacity for trust grows.

And yes, there is nothing more risky than authentic faith in the living God. This not a sentimental gesture for sunny days, it is a daring decision to wholly trust in God - even when the evidence is absent. Karl Barth, in his commentary on Ephesians makes a similar claim about hope, which of course is related to faith.

"To hope is to intentionally align oneself with God, with all the risk that such partisanship involves. It is a declaration of war against the reality of this world. You could call it the willingness to see the world completely unromantically and without any illusions."

What's even more astonishing about this daring act of faith is the claim that the old you is passing away, while the new you - the new creation - is coming into being. That claim on most days seems to run counter to all evidence, nevertheless this new creation is the creation of God and wholly dependent upon God's Spirit. Our call is to a daring life of faith, trusting God who is the Camino that provides.

Such faith - that is utterly aligned with God - is fearless in the face of the threats of this world. We who walk in the Way of Jesus Christ know - by faith - that "all shall be well" not because we are Pollyanna; because we depend solely on the power of the God who is able to do far more than we can imagine. We have no faith in ourselves. Our faith is in the living God who is making a new creation. This gives us the audacity to see beyond what is visible into the invisible reality of God at work in our lives. We are then free to expose the lies of this present world and all the false claims to truth. Our faith in God makes us fearless in the face of those who would destroy the dignity of innocent children and their parents seeking asylum as they flee violence and extreme poverty.

When we dare this kind of walking by faith, trusting completely in the presence and provisions of God, strange and beautiful things come into being, often beyond our imagination. Congregations and communities flourish. Broken hearts are mended with patient love, strangers are welcomed because we see the new Creation God is bringing

into being. Recently, when a call from Christians went out on social media to find legal help for families at the border, within nine hours nearly \$1 million dollars came forth along with offers of hospitality. God provides.

Therefore, let us dare to walk in faith, confident that God is alive and well, at work among us. The old is passing away, you are a new Creation.

Now to the one who is able to do far more than we can ask, think or imagine - to this God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be all honor, praise and glory.

Amen