
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

June 26, 2016

Where to Begin

“Rather, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Acts 1:8 (Common English Bible)

When the king in *Alice in Wonderland* was asked where to begin, he said gravely, “Begin at the beginning... and go on till you come to the end: then stop.” Begin at the beginning. Naturally, that guidance seems reasonable. That is, until you have to actually open your mouth, and speak. With thoughts racing from one place to another, it quickly becomes apparent that there are many fine places to begin. Jesus tells his disciples, here in Acts, “you will be my witnesses.” Where do the disciples begin? Where are we to begin? Sharing our faith in Jesus seems reasonable until we actually confront that moment – that moment when we are asked, “Who is Jesus?”

That moment came to me one Easter morning. I was enjoying breakfast in a Doylestown, PA diner, looking over the message I would preach in just a few hours. Mary, the waitress assigned to the table where I was seated, approached with coffee and said, “I guess this is your big day, pastor!” “I guess so,” I remarked. Then Mary asked, “What is Easter all about anyway?” Initially, I dismissed her question, not thinking she was serious. But I was mistaken; Mary was very serious. It was then I took the time to really notice her, to look into her eyes and really see her. I will not forget those eyes - eyes that betrayed her silence; silence of considerable pain. “Where do I begin?” I thought. I began with her pain. “Easter means that you can stop beating yourself up. Whatever guilt you may have now, whatever mistakes you have made in life, Easter means that you are to stop immediately from beating yourself up. God has removed it all.”

“But there is more,” I said to Mary. “Easter is an invitation to pay attention to Jesus.” I shared with Mary that as she paid attention to Jesus, by reading of him in the Bible, she will discover that she will want to be more than she is now. “Pay attention long enough to Jesus and you will experience a compulsion to be something more; you will begin to live differently.” Mary needed to hear that Jesus doesn’t leave a life unchanged. Any significant time spent with Jesus always results in a desire to be made new. “Your whole world will appear different. You will want to be different.”

“Finally, Mary, begin to follow Jesus as you learn about him.” I shared with her that what that means is to “do what he asks in his teaching.” Imagine Jesus as a mentor in life and do everything that is asked of you. Something inexplicable happens when someone commits to doing all that Jesus’ asks: they receive an uncommon power to do so. People who obey all that they understand of Jesus’ teachings receive a power from outside of themselves; a power that actually makes them something so much more than what they were. Mary began to cry and asked how to begin. That is when I knew I had come to the end. And there, in a diner in Doylestown, PA, Mary gave her life to Jesus.

Doug Hood