

Musings on Ireland and the effect it had on my life.

I spent the last week trying to recover physically and to wring every drop of revelation and meaning out of my trip to Ireland. What can we learn from the people in Ireland and their experience of the last thirty years that will affect our lifestyle? More importantly, what is Jesus saying to us in our current situation?

One thing is certain; He said things to them and to the people in Australia and the community in New Zealand that catapulted them on a journey that has lasted thirty years and that we can learn from after six years on the same track. I don't want to make the same mistakes they made. I want to learn from them, but not follow a recipe. Our journey has just started in comparison and they are the proof that it is possible to serve Jesus and grow in the soil of total freedom. I sometimes feel as if I am traveling at great speed on a road that I don't know. I have to hear the inner voice of Jesus while the wind of confusion is howling through the cracks in my windscreen. I may have to reduce speed for a while at least to be able to hear above the roar of the wind of my own effort and struggle. I want to do what I have to do at the right time. I want to learn but I want to hear for myself while looking at the tracks others have made through the swamp of this life. If every single one of those who read this article will slow down to hear His voice, think what can happen!

Fitted together by what every joint supplies.

I want to use Paul's well known words to the Ephesians as a skeleton for what I feel I have learnt: *But that you, speaking the truth in love, may in all things grow up to Him who is the Head, even Christ; from whom the whole body, fitted together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of each part, producing the growth of the body to the edifying of itself in love. (Eph 4:15-16)*

I have seen a model in which every joint of the body is working effectually. Every joint supplies without being coached and cajoled into action by a leader or pastor. Every joint works efficiently as if being motivated by an inner choirmaster and the resulting sound is an opera. The whole body is brought together by hearing this inner voice and working effectively to produce what that inner voice desires. And the result is love. They give because they love. They invite people into their homes for extended periods because they love. They go out of their way to help people because they love. The body is working because it loves not because it needs the affirmation of the Head or of any other member.

Grown in love.

The body has grown in love through the years. There is no outward manipulation to do the right things or to be at certain places or act in certain ways. Everybody is really free to hear the inner voice of the Choirmaster and react in unison. The bonding factor and the motivating factor is really love. They do not do programs at all. They do not belong anywhere so they do not get their identity from the group they belong to, they get it from Jesus. So they do not do things because it is what 'we' do. They act when prompted and He is prompting them all the time. And one of the amazing results is that they have not lost one of their children to the world in thirty years!

Paul said that we grow up into the Head, Jesus by speaking the truth in love. So where we are able to speak the truth in freedom and where love and not organisation is the medium of our conversation, we grow up into Jesus. They have grown up into the Head because they were released from the bondage of church structure and the fruit of that is now

evident. Because they had nothing to put in place of Jesus, not a leader, pastor, ministry, meeting or organisation, they grew up into the Head. Jesus was set in place as the Shepherd by the removal of the 'under-shepherds' and it bore fruit as their eyes were focused on Him alone. They could speak the truth without fear of discipline and they learnt how to do that through the medium of love. And they grew up into Him. That is why their actions speak of His life. That is why they don't need programs to care for the needy. They can live the purpose driven life because they are motivated by hearing the voice of the Shepherd not because they have done the course.

Accepting one another in love.

These people are not perfect by a long shot. There are the normal difficulties in relationships and the normal pain we all experience while being in the wilderness of God's dealings. They are also struggling with their imperfections but when it comes to do things in love, to live the life pastors are preaching about every Sunday, they are light years ahead of what we see in the majority of church going Christians and amongst our group. The love of Christ abounds amongst them. There seems to be an unconditional acceptance of one another. After all these years together there is a freedom to be oneself without fear of rejection that is refreshing. There are glaring imperfections as there should be in all groups but the difference is that they have accepted each other for who they are and they love one another, although sometimes with a smile or a grimace. Jesus said to me: 'You are amongst giants.'

Growing out from the Head.

It is from the Head that the body will be moved to function. The brain is essential for the movement of every joint. If the connection to the brain is compromised then the joints are not able to function as they were designed to and the body is ineffectual as a whole. Let us understand the dysfunction we see around us as being proportionate to the lack of functional connections of the individuals to Jesus. Then we may be able to understand the difference between normal church life and what these people are experiencing.

If we can see this then we will also understand the importance of our own connection to the Head. We will know what to pray for. We will know where to focus. The functionality will come as a result of our position within the neural system of the body and we will only be able to respond to the prompting of the Head. We will at last understand the importance of being in instead of doing.

Called to know Jesus.

I have been called to know Jesus. I have given my life to do that and He has been faithful in helping me on the journey. I have seen Him many times in the last three years and have come to know Him as my Friend. The proof of the pudding is in my transformed life. Ask my wife and children about that. I focused on growing up into Jesus and the Head in His mercy responded to change me. The change came from the connection. He gave the faith and the perseverance I needed to remain connected and be changed. My prayer life is changing from asking to talking to Him all day. My expectancy is changing from waiting for results to enjoying the conversation. My fulfillment is increasingly coming from the relationship and not from answered prayer. Because of the love I am experiencing from Him I am loving more. I find more compassion for the weak because I have found such weakness in myself and such strength in Him. The Head is increasingly getting His way. If this goes on I will be able to give myself as a sacrifice, holy and acceptable to Him. With Paul I want to say quickly, 'not that I have attained or am

already perfected but I press on that I may lay hold of that for which Christ has laid hold of me’.

Why the testimony?

I include the testimony because I want to illustrate the possibilities of this way of thinking. We need to testify about the success of our experiment at some stage. I set out on an experiment six years ago. I said that I will seek to know Jesus and leave the effectiveness of my ministry and my prayers to Him and it is time to take stock. Did it work to only seek Him? Yes, I can testify of that and so can my wife and children and others to whom I minister.

I know others who can testify of the same changes. My wife is one and Jesus has blessed me more than I could have asked for with the changes I see in the lives of my children. We are increasingly focusing on Jesus and He is increasingly transforming us. Others in our group can testify of the same thing and we need to hear their testimonies so that we can stay on the journey. Ask them and you will hear. Invite them to your house for supper and listen. We need to move away from the false humility that keeps us from testifying about the power of the life of Jesus in us and allow ourselves to be broken vessels from which the life of Jesus can shine forth.

This is what happened to me in Ireland. I testified of the closeness of Jesus and the effect of His love on my life and they heard because they were prepared by Him to hear. They were blessed because they wanted to hear. Many of those people are on the brink of discovering the real goal of their journey – not a place or another way of doing church but a Person. Not that they have not yet discovered the Head in a personal way. Not that they are not more closely connected to the Head than I am in many ways, especially in the manifestations of love. But many of them have thought that their identity is somehow connected to the fact that they have come out of the box of religious conformity. Much of the talk is about the way they do church because that sets them apart from others and provides a place of identity. Many of them are now learning that Jesus wants to be that identity. They have grown into Him but have not recognised their new identity for what it is – the life of a person. That is what I testified about and that is what I want to testify about to all who would listen.

Called to go in.

We have not been called to come out of anything. We have been called to go into something. Not another system or way of doing but into a Person. Jesus said, ‘Come to Me’.

I have been called to this: to pray for a manifestation of Jesus that will be so prevalent that connecting to Him will be so natural and easy that it will be possible for even the youngest baby Christian to connect and remain connected to the only source of real power that will change us.

I want to put that out as a challenge to whosoever wants to listen. Join me in praying for the faith to see Jesus in every situation and let us pray for ourselves and for each other. Our identity is the same as that of Jesus: we are children of the Father, not members of the Emerging Church or the Vineyard, or the fellowship in Ireland, or the Methodist church or the Relational Church. We are friends of Jesus, brothers and sisters of the Son of Man and students of the Holy Spirit. That is our identity; that is our life and our hope. There is a choice before each one of us. We can not expect to drift into the experience of this truth. When Jesus encountered the man at the pool of Bethesda he asked him, ‘Do

you really want to be healed?’ After thirty two years of paralysis that was a non-brainer question to ask. But this man had to make a decision. He was not going to drift into the miracle Jesus had for him. Up to that point he was carried where others thought he should go. He needed others to cater for his most basic needs. He could not care for himself and in a certain way that provided a place to hide from the pain and responsibilities of life. But now he had to make a decision.

Making a decision.

Oswald Chambers said, “It really is true to say, ‘I can not live a holy life’, but you can decide to let Jesus Christ make you holy. You can not serve the Lord but you can place yourself in the proper position where God’s almighty power will flow through you.” This is your decision today. There is a position to take and it is the position of prayer. We want something and it is not going to come without asking and continuous asking. The place of healing is in conversation with Jesus and the time to increase that conversation is now.

Let us consider one another.

Hebrews 10:24-25: *and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh.*

Oswald Chambers said: “the ideas put forth in these verses from Hebrews 10 are those of stirring up one another and keeping ourselves together. Both these require initiative – our willingness to take the first step toward Christ realisation, not the initiative toward self-realisation. To live a distant, withdrawn and secluded life is diametrically opposed to spirituality as Jesus Christ taught it.”

I had my Bethesda in Pietermaritzburg six years ago and then placed it before the congregation that met at that time: “Do you really want to be healed?” We could not foresee the effect of that choice. Even in our wildest dreams no one could at that time have known where we would be in 2007. I had another experience in this vein in Dublin and the choice I made may affect my future actions. Our situation has changed and I can not speak for you anymore as I could then. I can not say to you, ‘thus saith the Lord’ for this group because we are not connected like that anymore. This is an individual journey that becomes corporate only to the extent that we walk it together so you have to hear Jesus ask you the question. I can only be obedient and provoke you unto loving Him enough that you will be willing to lay your life down for Him and for your friends.

I can only stir you up to listen. I can choose not to forsake fellowship with you. I can choose to place myself before Jesus and remain there until I see healing – not only in myself but also in you. I can choose to pray for myself and for you. I can choose to love a thousand times a day and call on Him for help when you are making it difficult.

The place of healing will be the place of connection to the Head. The place of growing into Him to such an extent that He becomes my identity. And for that we need to remain in conversation with Jesus, unceasingly.