

January 3, 2016      “Who Do You Walk With?”      John 8:48-49

I can hear the voice of Mrs. Westbrook saying, “Morley, you know better!” In my mind's eye she is smiling slightly. But she is serious. And yes...I know better. The title of this message should be composed as “With Whom Do You Walk?” The pronoun whom is proper in this case because it is the object of the preposition with. In Grades XII and XIII I was one of Mrs. Westbrook's best students and the subject was English...both Grammar and Composition or writing skills. She was a great teacher. Always soft spoken. And for reasons I can never explain, the boys in her classes were always afraid of disappointing her. With Whom Do You Walk?

The portion I read to you this morning from John chapter 8 actually begins with these words back in verse 12: “Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’” The fact that we are here, especially given the nature of the times, implies that to some degree we are believers. To some degree we are all endeavouring to walk with God, to walk with Jesus, to walk in His Spirit, to walk in the light of life.

It is a brand new year. And the year 2016, some would say is a perfect time for making resolutions. It is a quibble over words, but I am suggesting I have not made one. And yet I did set a goal which I have every intention of trying to achieve. It may be the same thing. Even I am forced to quote John Wayne in the old movie Rio Bravo, “I would hate to live on the difference,”...in my case I would hate to stake my life on the difference between making a resolution and setting a goal. So I will come to the point.

My personal goal for 2016 is to walk, not in the footsteps

of Jesus, (been there and done that) but to walk with Jesus. And yes, there is a difference. You may well wonder what the difference could possibly be? Whether it is my age (I certainly know I resist change in personal routines) or perhaps it is the times, which I know are always changing and have always brought change, there is just so much change so fast, I want to slam on the brakes. Listen to the wind singing through meadow grass, or hushing through the leaves on the tree, or droning through the naked limbs in mid winter.

I want to be still. There are things you can only know and I mean experience in stillness. Psalm 46:10 “Be still and know that I am God,” says the Lord. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me, will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” The goal then, is to follow Jesus, to not walk in darkness, to walk in the light of life.” And you might be tempted to ask, what dear boy do you think you have been doing all these years? It is not like I have been indifferent to God Almighty, to Jesus His only begotten Son, to the Holy Spirit whom the Father and the Son pour forth upon us and into us.

I think it has something to do with cancer and cancer treatment. For me that whole mix of experiences and treatment and healing has distilled into one droplet of insight. When it comes to this world, this life, this physical body, I'm not going to live forever. No new insight there really. But there is the intensification of an insight. I am so much closer to the finish line than I have ever been before. As Scrooge saw by the time he found himself in the Ghost of Christmas yet to come, “time grows short.” He bids the spirit of which he is confessedly most afraid, to lead him onward, to teach him the vital lessons he must learn before the night is over.

It is about the intensity of the experience. I have followed in the footsteps of Jesus. Sometimes at what I personally regarded as a safe distance. After all, it is a matter of logic that if you get too close to the fire...you could get burned. And I have been Presbyterian for a long time. I have come to treasure the wisdom of doing all things in moderation. Which is to say I have laboured to be calm, cool and collected. There have been moments when I have been mildly chided for being too...enthusiastic. If nothing else, I have certainly listened to those voices in my past and definitely weighed the options...sought to be careful, reasonable, faithful but also logical.

So be it my age, a brush with serious illness, something that I cannot quite put my finger on, I have come to a conclusion I find surprising. The time for calm and cool and collected is long past. It is a time for something far more passionate. I do not just want to follow Jesus, I want to be at His elbow as it were. I want to be chastised when I get something wrong. I want to be so close, I get most things right. As Eric Little said back in 1924, explaining to his sister why he was going to the Olympics "God made me fast, and when I run I feel His pleasure." Eric was a Scott...I have always presumed he was a Presbyterian. Regardless, I want to feel God's pleasure as I attempt to keep up to Him, to follow Him almost elbow to elbow, I want to walk in the light of life...and know that I am doing so.

The question is how to achieve it? And I am aware that even framing the question that way is close to error because it assumes the cruciality of what I do, and while I know I have to be active in this to some degree, I am also aware...very aware...the grace of God is something given. The question might better be

worded “How to receive it?”

I am Presbyterian. And in fact I have always believed and acted upon the belief that I did not choose this path for myself, it was chosen for me. Destiny. God opened a doorway. I followed. It led here. So I say it again. By God's grace I became and am Presbyterian. And being Presbyterian has always put clues and tools for being closer to Jesus than I have been in the past to hand. I believe I need to spend more time reading the Bible. Reading Scripture got me this far. I will not set aside that which has proven its value in the past. But I must intensify that part of my work. Read more and more often. Time in God's word can only lead to blessing. This is about receiving blessing to be a blessing.

I need to spend more time in prayer. When I was younger I can remember mentioning in a message that I preached, praying while waiting in line to be served by a teller at the bank. It was routine in those days to have a half dozen people ahead of me when paying my bills. If I am attentive I can pray in line at the theater. At Tim Horton's. I spend a lot of time in a month in line at Tim Horton's. And what I need to pray about is what I am reading that particular day in whatever chapter of the Bible I have been reading. I need to pray for light. Insight. Closeness to God, being in the heart of His will. I need to pray for clarity of conviction. For healing for those I know who are ill. For direction for those whom I know are tryin to figure out what to do next. I need to pray with people with whom I am making this pilgrimage into and through the final chapters sof my earthly life, aware that there is a whole new realm of life beyond the present.

The Presbyterian Church In Canada is once again

endeavouring to weigh its steps forward through the question of ordaining gays to ministry and eldership. I have been asked to speak on the matter of what the Scriptures say, and our tradition has been. Instinctively I prefer to avoid controversy. This is not a time for being on the sidelines. I need to be calm and yet passionate. Gracious and yet bottom line. This is about the centrality of the Scriptures in our denomination, in the church, in our personal pilgrimage of faith. I need to pray my way through the preparation of that presentation and I need to be like Luther in a different age...Here I stand...I can do no other. Lord place my feet upon the solid rock. Lord let me conquer my fears of sounding like a fossil, and being yesterday's man.

To follow Jesus closely, I need to sing. Praising the Lord must be the sounds that occupy my mouth. Praise has always been defined by us as one of the means of grace, one of the ways we access the grace of God. I have to sing. I have to sing praise songs.

And I have to be in the midst of the fellowship. The Christian pilgrimage, the journey of faith is never made alone or in isolation. That was the mistake made by the church in the age of the monasteries and abbies. I must have one foot firmly planted in the midst of the fellowship of the church and the other planted firmly in the midst of the world in our day...aware of the latest news, the latest trends, the new currents represented in thoughtful writing and entertainment and yet holding tightly to that which is everlasting...God, Jesus, the Holyness of His present Spirit.

It is a new year. And once again it is time to strap on the armour of God and do battle with the enemy where the enemy occupies turf. God help us! I will follow Jesus. I will walk in the

light of life. Let us pray.

Guide our footsteps dear Lord. We cannot help but be afraid. Be our closest friend. Shine your light in the places of darkness that falls upon us, into which we stumble, when we knowingly or unknowingly enter into it. Fill us with your Spirit. Surround us as we try to find our footing, and the path that leads where you would have us go. Glory be to your name, now and always.  
Amen