

SISTERS OF JESUS WAY

Summer Letter 2008



Our dear friends,

We sincerely hope that you will read this letter carefully (perhaps more than once) and also spend time looking up the Scripture references that we have given. Much of it has arisen out of pastoral work in recent months; Christians confused amongst other things about the Florida blessing, gay and lesbian sex and related issues, to mention two that we could highlight. The one thing they all have in common is that they are divisive issues. Once there are two opposing points of view it is very easy for self-righteousness to creep in.

We can be quick to put the world and other people to rights but amazingly blind when it comes to putting our own house in order. We slip at an alarming rate into legalism that is a life punctuated by “ought”, “must” and “should”. If we go down that route it isn’t long before we are demanding that other people “ought to”, “should” and “must”, as well! Someone somewhere does something of which we don’t approve. Condemnation rises to the surface, the disapproving look or the disparaging comment. The Pharisee is in the making. The Lord spoke about judging others. He said that we were not to do it.ⁱ In the same way he was equally clear that there must be no exception to our loving.ⁱ Difficult!

Sometimes our condemning, unloving attitude arises because we are in a situation where we are confronted with views and/or behaviour with which in all conscience we can’t agree. If we find ourselves up against others who are more able to argue their corner, more educated, more intelligent or stronger we may feel threatened and vulnerable. Our reaction can then sometimes be hardness or even outright attack.

The Lord is opposed to arroganceⁱⁱ whether that arises from superiority or insecurity. When we feel threatened it is wiser to recognise that is how we feel. If we are finding it difficult to be gracious and loving, it is better to admit it. The Lord cares for the humble.ⁱⁱⁱ If we are articulate, well educated and strong in our views we need to examine our hearts before the Lord and ask his forgiveness if we have been a stumbling block for one of his little ones. He calls us all to be humble.^{iv}

How do we love in a difficult or threatening situation? The answer lies in fixing our gaze on Jesus^v and realising how much we are loved.^{vi} Sometimes we make God in our own image and do great damage to others and ourselves. Our god may be hard and unforgiving or neatly encapsulate our lifestyle. He may be a sensationalist. How can we disentangle the true God from our own and others’ misconceptions? How do we know the nature of God? We see the nature of God in the Lord Jesus, in the four gospels, the writings of the early church and the lives of the saints including those we know. It is this Christ we follow.

He loves the lost, the poor, the sick, the guilty-ones, the needy-ones and yes, even the poor, proud Pharisees but they would not accept his love. We are all somewhere in that list. The tragedy of the hardhearted Pharisees was that they did not see how much they were loved.^{vii} If they had seen it, it would have broken their hearts. The Pharisee lurks in all of us. Once our hearts are broken or continually being broken by the love of God it is not so difficult to be loving and gracious to others. Our hearts overflow with love. It is impossible not to love.^{viii}

We are aware also of the arguments from psychology, the lack of self-worth, the poor self-image and so on. Which of us does not have a poor self-image and a lack of self-worth before God? It is a stepping stone into the Kingdom of God not a stumbling block. As Sisters it was only when we stopped trying primarily to understand each other and

incidentally ourselves (psychology) and instead sought the grace of God and the light of His Holy Spirit^{ix} that we came together as a community living in love and forgiveness. Psychology has its place but it is dangerous to make it pre-eminent.

Jesus made no exceptions, we are all loved and we are all to love. Is then all behaviour acceptable? This was an argument St Paul faced head on: God loves and forgives, therefore do what you want.^x The love of God however is not weak and sentimental. He is also just. There are two words to bear in mind, one is “discernment” and the other is “sin”. Following the path of love with the Lord Jesus does not mean we suddenly become blind to all that is happening around us. On the contrary our eyes are opened. Discernment and love weep with the Lord Jesus.

Jesus said, “Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin!”^{xi} St Paul wrote, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”^{xii} St John wrote similarly.^{xiii} This will inevitably bring us into conflict.^{xiv} Today as we were completing this letter we had an email from a delighted friend with pictures taken from a scan of her baby at fourteen weeks in the womb. It was awesome, a clear little head was visible but our hearts sank when we thought of the number of abortions taking place much later than fourteen weeks.

Freedom in the New Testament is not freedom to do what we want, usually that which is most pleasing to our sinful nature. There is a parable in the gospels where Jesus speaks about a wedding guest who had come to the banquet in the wrong clothes.^{xv} The King spoke lovingly to him, “Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?” “The man was speechless”, sensing the judgement that was about to come. It all sounds rather shocking when all the poor man had done was wear the wrong clothes. Although note, he didn’t say he was sorry, and wearing the wrong garments at a banquet was considered an insult to the host.

What is Jesus saying to us in this story? In Judaism at the time, “it was the current belief that no descendant of Abraham could be lost.”^{xvi} Jesus is challenging that misconception. For us too, believing that we are justified by faith and robed in the righteousness of Christ is not sufficient; there must be through God’s grace a change of life.

“The point of the story is that Jesus is telling the truth, ---- the truth that God’s kingdom is a kingdom in which love and justice and truth and mercy and holiness reign unhindered. They are the clothes you need to wear at the wedding. And if you refuse to put them on, you are saying you don’t want to stay at the party. That is the reality.”^{xvii} Being clothed in Christ in the world sets us firmly on a path that may bring suffering.

About 100 years ago Japan seized control of Korea. The infant Christian church in that country was swept along by patriotism and hatred of the enemy. Some of their leaders held steady, calling the church to the sacrificial path of love that Christ taught. Very soon after this the Holy Spirit fell in power on the Korean Church at a meeting in Pyongyang and the great Korean Revival began. There was weeping and repentance. Many hidden sins came into the light. But what years of suffering have followed for this faithful church. In North Korea it has continued to the present day. They are faithful even to death.

“Therefore, (our) dear brothers (and sisters) stand firm.”^{xviii} Guard against self-righteousness, be gracious and loving. Be prepared for suffering.

May the Lord give us his grace.

Yours in the love of Christ Jesus,

The Sisters of Jesus Way

ⁱ Matt 7:1

ⁱⁱ Luke 6:27

ⁱⁱⁱ Is 2: 11, Is 2:17, Is.13:11,Rom.11:20, Mark 7: 22,23

^{iv} Matt 11:29, Matt 5:5

^v Matt 11:29, 1 Peter 5:5-6

^{vi} Hebrews 12:2

- vii 1 John 4:16
- viii Matt 23:37
- ix 1 John 4:19-21
- x John 1:7
- xi Romans 6:15
- xii Matt 18 : 7
- xiii Romans 12:2
- xiv 1 John 2:15-17
- xv John 15:18
- xvi Matt 22:11
- xvii R T France Matthew pg156
- xviii Tom Wright Matthew for Everyone pg 85
- xix 1 Cor 15:58

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