

ARE YOU FOLLOWING JESUS TIMIDLY OR SURE-FOOTEDLY?

Today's Text: Mark 10: 32-45

Extracts:

Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed. And as they followed they were afraid. Then He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him. And scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And on the third day He will rise again" [Mk 10: 32-34]

Christopher 'Dudus' Coke is a major Jamaican drug lord who is wanted in the United States for serious drug-related offenses.¹ He is in charge of Tivoli Gardens, a crime den in Kingston, the Jamaican capital, where he provides protection, jobs, housing and other services to thousands of his followers. On May 17, 2010, after nine months of culpable hesitation, the Jamaican government finally gave police the warrant to arrest Coke for extradition to America. His followers rallied and promised to protect him from arrest at any cost. After a week of armoured attacks and over 70 deaths, Coke has not been found or arrested.

Christopher Coke is a suspected criminal. Yet, see how boldly and fearlessly his followers have defended him. Sooner than later, he may be caught or could be killed. Yet his followers will not give up on him. But on the day that Jesus headed towards Jerusalem, to His death, His disciples that had seen His power and miracles for three years followed Him timidly- scared and afraid! Even for us today who know that Christ has risen and is with us always, how many of us are following Him boldly and confidently (i.e., sure-footedly)? Do you? Let us find out from this week's study.

¹ Story based on the following sources: "Profile: Christopher 'Dudus' Coke," 24 May, 2010; http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/latin_america/10146172.stm ; "Q & A: What is behind Jamaica's mayhem," <http://worldblog.msnbc.msn.com/archive/2010/05/25/2328474.aspx> , May 25, 2010; and "All out war-As Trivoli assault deepens, casualties rise," May 25, 2010; <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20100525/lead/lead1.html> ;

1. Background: Scared to death or scared of death?

In this week's Bible text, Jesus was heading in the direction of Jerusalem to suffer and die in the hands of the Jews and Gentiles (Romans), after which He would rise again. On previous occasions, He had made the point to His disciples. For example, soon after He had revealed the concept of His church to Peter and the other disciples, He "began to show to [them] that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day" [Matt. 16: 21]. Soon after His Transfiguration which was witnessed by Peter, James and John, He had told them that the Son of Man was about to suffer in the hands of the same people that had eliminated John the Baptist [Matt. 17: 1-12]. On another occasion, as they were staying in Galilee, He warned them again, saying, "The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up" [vv. 22-23].

Now, the moment that He had spoken about so often and so clearly had come. Jesus was taking sure steps to His death in Jerusalem. He was walking ahead of His disciples and they were expected to follow with equal zeal and confidence their leader whom they had lived with for three years. They had heard His profound words and seen His numerous miracles. They had come to believe that He is the Messiah. But to head boldly with Him to Jerusalem to complete His earthly ministry? That was too much for them. We are told that they were amazed (that He was facing danger boldly) and "as they followed *they were afraid*." He certainly noticed their hesitation. So, "He took the twelve [apostles] aside *again* and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him" [Mk 10. 32-34]

Why were they afraid or too timid to go with Him? Was it that they did not believe all that He had been telling them? Before we can answer that question, let us first examine ourselves. Given what we know about Jesus today that His disciples could not comprehend on that journey to Jerusalem, many of us still relate to Him in tentative ways, characterized by fear and timidity. We hardly follow Him in full assurance and trust that He will do what He says He will do. Even after praying and fasting, we fret and remain anxious. What is really happening?

2. Challenges to following Jesus confidently

On the day of His ascension into heaven, Jesus assured His disciples and future followers, "*I am with you always, even to the end of the age*" [Matt. 28: 20]. He left us with another Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who will guide us into all truth [Jn 16: 13]. He assured us that in Him, we shall have peace contrary to tribulation that the world can offer. However, we should be of good cheer because He has overcome the world [v. 33]. With such assurances, we should follow Him sure-footedly. However, we do not because of some or all of the following reasons:

a) *Fear of the unknown*

In spite of His assurances to them, the disciples could not imagine a future without Jesus physically in their midst. Who would protect them against the perennial doctrinal battles with the Jewish leaders and political unrest of the Jews against Roman authorities? After all, most of the disciples were mere fishermen from Galilee without the spiritual influence of the scribes, the high education of the Pharisees or the political clout of the Romans. So fear of the unknown gripped them.

We are faced with similar questions today as then. Most of us dread the unknown because it leaves us with uncertainty. For example, the bills are mounting but there is no visible prospect of better income to pay them. Menopause is knocking and there is as yet no pregnancy, or hope for one before it is too late. You read the Bible and you keep getting assurances to fear not, to be anxious for nothing. Yet, each time you close the book, fear of the unknown returns to pound peace out of you. Such can tempt you to take matters into your hands by seeking help from the world.

Take the example of a boat trip that Jesus once took with His disciples after they had left multitudes of listeners by the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was in the stern of the boat, asleep on a pillow. There was a great windstorm that beat into the boat, such that it began to fill to the point of sinking. In spite of the fact that Jesus was there with them, fear of sudden death took over. They came to Jesus and woke Him up, saying, “Teacher, *do You not care that we are perishing?*” [Mk 5: 36-38]. That sounds like a rebuke out of panic! Do we not do worse today? Do we not blame Him when something bad happens to us? Do we not complain and wonder why we should bother to be faithful to Him if He does “not care” when evil people seem to be defeating us? That is the fear of the unknown at work! Jesus arose and rebuked the wind, saying, “Peace, be still!” After a great calm had been restored, Jesus turned to His disciples and said, “*Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?*” [vv. 39-40].

From that story, we learn that the antidote for fear of the unknown is faith in Christ Jesus because without faith, it is impossible to please God [Heb. 11: 6]. By faith, you know *in advance* what God is going to do for “surely, the Lord God does nothing, unless He [first] reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” [Amos 3: 7]. If you are a true and faithful man/woman of God and the Holy Spirit lives in you [1 Cor. 3:16], then you will know the mind of God because you have the mind of Christ [1 Cor. 2: 16].

b) *Disappointments*

Some of us are under the mistaken impression that once you are a true follower of Jesus, you will never have problems again. That is a fallacy that has led many believers astray. For example, you may still fail exams or remain barren or lose jobs or face serious accidents or illnesses. Does that mean that Jesus does not care or answer prayers? No!

There are several possible explanations for unanswered prayers or those answered outside of our expectation. For example, you could be asking amiss. The word of God says, “You ask and do not receive *because you ask amiss that you may spend on your pleasures*” **[Jam. 4: 3]**. You should not ask for a child when you are not married. That is asking amiss. Rather, you should first ask for a suitable spouse. The baby will come after the honeymoon! Even in marriage, you should not ask for children just to match competition. For example, as long as Hannah prayed for a child, presumably to help her fight off taunting from Peninnah, her husband’s other wife, nothing happened. But when she prayed for a son that she would lend to God as priest and judge, the Lord answered and gave her Samuel **[1 Sam. 1-20]**. Thereafter, God gave her five more children **[1 Sam. 2: 21]**!

Another possible explanation to provide us with *a training opportunity or a necessary maturation period* to grow our faith. That is why you should “count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, *lacking nothing*” **[Jam. 1: 2-3]**. Without testing, trials and tribulations, you may never be able to develop strong muscles of faith that you will require in an increasingly complex and wicked world. See how long it takes to get a good education. The road is strewn with failed and repeated tests, huge student loans and neglected family life. You are sustained by the hope that all will one day be over and that you will be in a better world.

Job has taught us how to cope with disappointments. As he suffered intense pain and abandonment by family and friends, he cried out, “though [the Lord] slay me, yet will I trust Him” **[Job 13: 15]**, and added, “I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that *in my flesh I shall see God*” **[Job 19: 25-26]**. That is the kind of hope that Jesus referred to in answer to Thomas’s skepticism about His resurrection when He said, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*” **[Jn 20: 24-29]**. So, when you face disappointments as you follow Jesus, do not detour and look elsewhere. Remain hopeful because He will never leave you nor forsake you **[Heb. 13: 5]**. After all, has faith not been defined as the substance of things *hoped for* **[Heb. 11: 1]**?

c) *Inability to forgive yourself*

Sometimes, we are discouraged from remaining steadfast with Jesus because we have refused to forgive ourselves for grievous sins that we have confessed and given up but the memory of which still makes us ashamed. For example, we may still remember how much damage we have caused others with our sexual immorality or lying or cheating. Even when they have forgiven us, we have not forgiven ourselves because we doubt if God Himself has in deed forgiven us.

To illustrate this point, we have the cases of Judas Iscariot and Peter who both betrayed Jesus. Judas sold Him to His enemies while Peter denied Him thrice during His trial. As soon as Judas realized that Jesus had been condemned to death, he became “remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, ‘*I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.*’” That suggests repentance. But he went and hanged himself [Matt. 27: 3-5], suggesting that he saw his sin as beyond pardon.

In the case of Peter, having realized that He had denied Jesus, he “went out and wept bitterly” [Matt. 26: 75]. You can imagine the impact that that event had on a usually assertive man like Peter. He had lost face among his fellow disciples. Shame would drive him to keep more to himself because his leadership credibility had been badly damaged. But Jesus knew that Peter would repent and be forgiven because, much earlier when Satan had asked for permission to sift Peter like wheat, Jesus had prayed for him that his faith should not fail, and when he had returned to Him, he should strengthen his brethren [Lk 22: 31-32]. But such promise did not erase the shame that Peter carried. So, the angel that spoke with Mary and other first visitors to the empty tomb on resurrection Sunday sent comforting word from Jesus when he said, “Go, tell His disciples- and Peter- that [Jesus] is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you” [Mk 16: 7]. Peter was one of His disciples. By specifically mentioning his name, it was to let him know that Jesus had already forgiven him. So, he should forgive himself and come along with the rest.

Sins against the Father and the Son will be forgiven, except those against the Holy Spirit [Matt. 12: 32]. Even so, blasphemy committed in ignorance God forgives as in the case of Paul [1 Tim. 1:13]. Therefore, forgive yourself because Jesus has long forgiven and forgotten. Come with boldness before His throne of grace and He will in no wise cast you out.

From the forgoing, we can conclude that *the disciples* that followed Jesus to Jerusalem *were afraid because their faith had not yet been developed*. They were still largely in flesh, jostling for favourable positions in the kingdom of God

without appreciating what that actually meant [Mk 10: 35-44]. However, after the resurrection of Jesus who spent forty days with them before His ascension, revealing the secrets of the Scriptures concerning Him to them [Lk 24: 44], they became transformed. Those fearful disciples that had followed Jesus timidly to Jerusalem returned to that same dreaded city with joy after He had ascended into heaven, “and were *continually in the temple praising and blessing God*” [Lk 24: 50-53]. A few days later, the Holy Spirit descended on them. Peter’s first crusade added three thousand new believers in one day [Acts 2: 1-41], thus launching the global Christian outreach that has changed the world! When the leaders “saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marvelled. And they realized that *they had been with Jesus*” [Acts 4: 1-13]. They were no longer timid. They had become sure-footed, bold and unbending followers of Jesus. How about you?

3. **Conclusion: Jesus is all-sufficient for you!**

Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever [Heb. 13: 8]. He is all-sufficient for you [Phil. 4: 19]. But *if you have no faith in Him, there is very little that He can do for you*. For example, in His own home region, they saw and treated Him merely as the son of the carpenter, not as the Messiah. As a result, “He did not do many mighty works there *because of their unbelief*” [Matt. 13: 54-58]. Your faith in the ability of Jesus to take care of your situation will give you the confidence to trust Him.

Follow Jesus with full confidence. Be sure-footed!