

*Bimal Thambyah, September 6, 2015*

**“But Jesus ... Walking in the steps of a subversive saviour : Staying silent”**

From the Leader magazine :

- Throughout the Gospels, Jesus engages in unpredictable, unexpected behavior. When circumstances would suggest Jesus should go this way, he goes that way. When others would seek an opportunity to speak, Jesus is *silent*.
- Jesus’ *silence* in the face of being charged with capital offenses is unexpected. In wrapping up the series “But Jesus...” this silence will allow us to reflect on two key things we learn from Jesus’ surprising actions:
  - We are not God. Much of Jesus’ activity is predicated on the firm belief that a sovereign God has ultimate responsibility for the outcome of human history. Jesus’ fate was not in the hands of the various “judges” he encountered (the chief priests, Pilate, Herod, the crowd), but in the hands of God. His journey had been determined in Gethsemane.
  - Jesus cares for and values each of us. Jesus’ willingness to surrender his own life on our behalf shows us the depth of that love. For the joy set before him, Christ endured the cross. The “joy” is the redeemed humanity being birthed within the lives of those who follow Christ.

To start, I am going to ask you to use your imagination .

Imagine that I have two sheets of paper in front of me and a pen on this podium. On the one sheet, I start writing all the bad things that I have done in my life. The list, I am sorry to say, will be quite long. But – I will try not to glory in them ...

On the other sheet, I start writing all the good things that I have done in my life. I like to think that what I am doing here, today, at MFM, is part of the good list.

Now if I try to trade off the good against the bad – I might be on to something. For example, I do not have a car, so I have some “carbon credits” ... so I don't have any guilt about taking long showers every day. By this trade off, I might have started a “new religion”. This religion might be even highly spiritual - but it will not be Christian.

At the risk of being called “opinionated”, or “passive aggressive” - I want to tell you something that you may or may not agree with today. I recently turned 69. I think that a sure sign of Christian maturity is when we realize that some of the items on the bad list are not all that bad, and some on the good list are not all that great.

If some fortune teller in Sri Lanka, then called Ceylon, had told me, when I was a teenager : 'When you are 69 years old you will be part of an odd group of people called the Mennonites, in a city called Montreal', I would have been quite amused. As I have gotten older, I am quite convinced that God has a sense of humour – Jesus definitely did!

Getting back to my two lists -

In a city like Montreal (or, for that matter, any city anywhere in the world) one can get anything one wants. Anything : sex, drugs, alcohol, all types of gourmet food, books, music, tattoos, body piercing, electronic gadgets - whatever gives you a kick; an adrenalin rush .

But what you cannot get all that easily is a group of people who can relate to you in any depth. At least this has been my experience. When I had heart surgery a couple of years ago, at least one senior nurse made a comment as to the number of people who visited me – she was quite impressed.

It is said that at a crucial point during his trial, Jesus was silent. He could have argued his case like a smart lawyer and got himself released – but he didn't do that; he was silent.

The symbol for today in this series is the cross. He was crucified . The word 'crucified' conveys very much more than the manner of His death. It explains why he died.

Why was Jesus crucified ?

He was crucified because :

- a ) Secular power found in Him a revolutionary ...
- b) Ecclesiastical power adjudged Him a blasphemer ...

c) Common people found Him awkward ...

In reading the gospel story, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that His death was something which He himself accomplished .

But at a crucial point in his trial he was silent ...

There are many in the world today who are powerless. Think of the people who are seeking refuge in Europe now. I think there is a link between their silence and Jesus' silence.

Silent meditation, contemplative prayer, or whatever else we may want to call it seems to us an unnecessary interlude in our busy schedule. But I think Jesus was a contemplative – he simply took time off to get his act together.

I was on holiday recently and visited France for the very first time ... it was truly a great experience, and one I will never forget. And so, to conclude my meditation, I will read a rather moving story, about a Bishop in France ...

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Three university students of Paris were walking along the road one Good Friday afternoon. They noticed crowds of people going to the churches to make their confession. The students began to discuss this custom of the 'unenlightened' and talked in rather cynical terms about the survival of religion, which they described as superstition.

Suddenly two of the students turned to the third, who was the leader among them, and said to him, 'Will you go into the church and tell the priest there what we have been saying to each other?' 'Sure I will' he said, and went in.

He stood in the queue of those who were going to their confession, and when his turn came, he looked at the priest and said , 'Father I have come here merely to tell you that Christianity is a dying institution and that religion is a superstition.'

The priest looked at the young man keenly and said , 'Why did you come here my son to tell me this ?' And the student told him of his conversation with his friends.

The priest listened carefully and then said: 'All right. I want you to do one thing before you go. You accepted the challenge of your friends and came here. Now accept my challenge to you. Walk up to the chancel and you will find there a large wooden cross, and on it the figure of Jesus crucified . I want you to stand before that cross and say these words : 'Jesus died for me and I don't care a damn.'

The student looked diffident but to save face, agreed.

He went up and stood before that cross and said it: 'Jesus died for me and I don't care a damn.'

He came back and said 'I have done it'.

'Do it once more ,' said the priest, 'after all it means nothing to you .'

The student went back and looked at the cross for some time, and the figure on it, and then stammered it out : 'Jesus died for me and I don't care a damn.'

He returned to the priest and said, ' I have done it, and ... I am going now .'

The priest stopped him. 'Once more' he said, 'just once more and you can go.'

The young man walked up to the chancel and looked at the cross again, and at the one crucified. He stood there for a long time. Then he came back to the priest and said, 'Father, can I make my confession now?'

The bishop concluded the story with these words : 'And my dear people, that young man was myself.'

Amen.