

**THE JOURNEY OF FAITH /THE JOURNEY AS FAITH**  
**"Love God and love your neighbour – on these 2 commands hang all the law and the prophets" Jesus.**

**"All theology is biography"**  
**Frederick buechner**

**Mark McCleary**

I'm standing at a bus stop in South London and the air is changing ...its going to rain – I can taste it on the air under the darkening sky ....I don't think it will be a thunder storm – just a shower ...not nearly so much fun, yet still its amazing to sit out here even in a city and feel the electricity in the air changing ...watch the light dim and know that its coming. I'm at the start of a journey, at the end of a journey and in the middle of a journey. Its called faith and I don't pretend to be a theologian or a philosopher – a storyteller maybe and its in story that I learn most. A man was taking his two camels to market. One camel had a load of cotton and the other carried a load of salt. On the way they had to cross a river which was flowing higher than usual. The water washed up over both camels. The camel carrying the salt felt his burden lift as the salt dissolved, but the camel carrying cotton almost drowned as his burden got heavier. Beliefs are often like that – what lightens the load of one can almost drown another because we are all in different places. God meets us all in different ways .

I agree with Buechner that all theology is biography – I cant give you my theology without sharing a little of my journey to this point. For many years it was all about getting to that destination called spiritual maturity and yet in trying to achieve it I think I missed a lot of the life more abundant. I've come from conservative Northern Ireland Evangelical stock – a tradition which has answers to everything – our faith was a nice little package with little mystery – you got saved and then the destination was heaven and we had lots of rules for how to live in between. We didn't like questions but like many of my countrymen I have a stubborn streak – I kept asking questions and expecting the answers to be there and when they weren't began to doubt God and my own faith. Its taken many years of struggle and wrestling to be where I am today – post evangelical perhaps the closest label ...yes I've read the book which is great up to a point in describing where I'd come from but didn't leave me with much of a map as to where I was going. I have been reading a book by Rainer Maria Rilke with words I wished I'd learnt years ago.

*"I want to beg you to be patient towards all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books written in a foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, that cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually without noticing it , live along some distant day into the answer."* Letters to a young Poet.

What does your faith become when its no longer as clear cut – when journey is not necessarily about reaching a destination but about stopping along the way to smell the flowers and enjoy it. To see God in every area of life – every mundane act – as my friend David Dark says to realise that “there is not a secular molecule in the universe.” Here’s my creed - True life is the appreciation of mystery ... to be able to see God in the boredom and frustration of a day as much as in the excitement .... to realise that to be alive is to be part of the beautiful dance of all creation. I have to keep reminding myself of that though not so much lately ... if people were to ask what it means to be a Christian – I’m not sure what I would say anymore. I don’t have any evangelical package to offer. All I can say is no matter how far I’ve gone away from it part of me has never let go – part of me has always known that God is there and there are more things in heaven and earth ...well you know the rest ...enough pretentious literary quotes. Somehow its real.....somehow that bread and wine taken from a man in a robe is saving my soul ...somehow the creator of the universe is present ...for me more so in the people than in the service itself .....3 things keep me at Church, communion , liturgy and the community of people ....for me to be a Christian is to accept and rejoice in the mystery of life and the wonder of existence ...I find it in walks by the ever restless sea , in visiting the ancient monastic sites of ireland , with friends drinking wine by a fire, even discussing the meaning of life over a cup of herbal tea. Basically living in the holy now. Each moment has been given to us – its sacramental – there is a joy in the journey .....as we realise that the journey is the destination. When we boil our faith right down it comes to this – two commandments – Love God and Love your neighbour. That is the essence of our journey – and I’m not talking about some hippy utopia where everything is all peace and love and wonderful. The journey can be pretty awful sometimes – sometimes God is not there it seems – I grew up in Belfast – one of my clearest memories is coming home from school to find out that the father of one of my best friends at the time had been shot dead. Did I have any answers then or now ? Can I explain it ? No I cant .

Yet if we cant embrace God in the painful things then what is our faith ....if we cant still trust even when life is shit then what is the point of faith ....a half belief that we forget when things don’t happen as we want them ... David sings the blues and it is there that we connect ....I see the tossed haired shepherd sitting on a mountain top with harp in hand ...strumming a blues riff ....on some days I want to do the same – I want to join him and ask God – even shout at God what the hell is going on. And that’s the point. Even in hell God is present – with us and for us.

I’ve always been a dreamer, wanting to dream and create a changing world ....better than this one .....it shouldn’t be hard ...except there is much that is wonderful and sacred about everyday life ...about the present moment ...I’m learning everyday that I haven’t arrived ... that the journey is the destination .....no more excuses ...no waiting for the perfect moment to do something

.....just get on with living this incredible thing called life. And Faith – the problem with being post evangelical is that you don't have as simple or compact a package to offer people – it feels a lot more complicated and yet I can never go back that way – even though many of my favourite people still live there ....many of them better and more holy than I'll ever be ...I have moments of doubt – life seemed so much simpler back then – yet for me where I am now is more true ..all theology is really biography says Buechner and I guess that's true – all of us trying to work out what our little lives mean and how to relate to God ....each generation needs to work it out anew ...each person every day in their generation. As for me my experience of God on the journey is still found in walks by the sea – in looking at the stars on a perfect night – on watching a spectacular thunder storm ...in my new born niece grabbing my hand and opening her dark eyes with wonder. In some ways I don't always expect to find him in church . . Each day I am a little less evangelical but not necessarily any wiser ....just more expectant of finding God in the strangest places. Places where you don't expect him to be ...sometimes even in my own life .