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Journey of Faith

2 Corinthians 5:7

The 1945 film *I Know Where I'm Going* is about a young Englishwoman who has not learned how to listen to her heart. Wendy Hiller plays the young woman who has planned her life very carefully. She is engaged to a wealthy industrialist who is leasing an island in the Scottish Hebrides. She travels to Scotland to marry him but events do not unfold in the way she expected. A storm prevents her from joining her fiancé on his island where the service is to take place. She is forced to hang out for several days on the isle of Mull where life beats to a different drum. She meets a strange assortment of people on Mull including a young naval officer who is a local clan leader. As she becomes attracted to the naval officer she begins to lose her sense of equilibrium. Suddenly she realizes that she doesn't know where she's going after all. All of her carefully laid plans are up for grabs. Her capacity to see what her fiancé's money will give her is no longer enough. In the end she listens to her heart and the direction of her life is changed.

It is this kind of change that Paul describes in 2 Corinthians. Paul is writing to an overconfident group of people who are sure that they know where they are going. They believe that they can see what is going on in the world. Paul warns them that they cannot trust their lives to what they see. They cannot depend on measurable results or outward appearances. They cannot depend on the trappings of wealth and success.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that following Christ means living in a different way. He wants them to understand that what is most important is the grace of God which cannot be seen. He writes, "...for we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7)." To walk by faith is to look beyond what glitters so that we can listen to hearts that have been changed by grace.

In Mark's Gospel we learn that those who have this capacity to listen are the ones who get the parables. Mark tells us that the parables have a dual quality about them. For some the parables reveal the nature of God's grace while for others the parables conceal the meaning of grace. In the same way some see Jesus as a parable of God's gracious activity in the world while others do not. To understand the parables we must learn to walk by faith and not by sight.

The most surprising discovery that I made during the John Calvin tour to Europe was the statue I found at the Church of St. Germain des Pres in Paris. There is nothing surprising about finding a statue at a Catholic church. But this Catholic church had a very impressive statue of a 16th century Protestant reformer. Bernard Palissy understood his life as a journey of faith. He embraced the Reformation in the city of Saintes near the Atlantic coast of France. There he helped to organize a very successful Protestant movement. Like many of the early followers of John Calvin he was an artist and an intellectual. He developed new lead based glazes which produced a different kind of ceramic than had ever been done before. Some of his work has survived and can be seen today in the Louvre in Paris. But the technique he used remains a mystery.

Palissy's work came to the attention of King Francis I who brought Palissy to Paris and gave him the title of "inventor of rustic figurines to the king." After Francis' death Palissy worked for the Queen, Catherine de Medici, on a grotto to decorate the gardens of the palace of the Louvre. He was in Paris when Catherine de Medici orchestrated the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572 and was one of the few Protestants in the city to survive that horrendous genocide. He fled Paris and lived in Sedan until the royal family lured him back to Paris. There Palissy continued his work while steadfastly refusing to renounce his faith. Then in 1588, when Palissy was 78 years old, he was arrested for being a Protestant. After spending two years in the Bastille he died.

I do not know why this large Palissy statue was placed on the grounds of a Catholic church in Paris in 1880. Maybe they present him as an artist who lived in the neighborhood while not admitting that he was a Protestant reformer. The statue shows the artist standing in his workshop wearing a thick apron. Cradled in his left arm is a bowl with one of his distinctive designs. His right hand is reaching down to a bench with an open Bible. His forefinger is touching the text which is the inspiration for his life and his art. His head is bowed in an attitude of prayer or meditation. It is as if he is listening to his heart and the word which has transformed it. "...for we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7)."