

'The Best-Laid Plans' >>>

What was he/she thinking? Are they kidding? No person in their right mind would...; that would never happen; my (fill in family member or friend) would never do such a thing; what kind of person would...?; how could you...? You've offended me!

These are all statements that we probably say/hear several times a day: they're almost automatic responses to something that has roused us or someone from complacency & routine. They challenge our accepted beliefs and opinions. They inspire the person saying them to believe it is their duty to speak up: to correct some wrong: whether it is their place or not.

All of them have the same underlying meaning: this is not acceptable to me & my belief system; my values; & you should be more like me.

Before we formulate beliefs & values, we enter this world as creations of our all-knowing, all powerful, holy, loving God: still close to His ways & expectations of love, service, forgiveness, constant growing/learning, & worship. God brings us along & prepares us for our place in His kingdom: how much we let him in, as it were, varies. Our beliefs & values develop through our experiences involving: family, friends, school, work, mentors, & the cultures we interact with every day. Through all this we evolve.

We develop strong ideas about pretty much everything. Sometimes these opinions & the circumstances that developed them, serve us well & sometimes they don't. Sometimes they are in keeping with the way of our Lord & sometimes they're not. But they're strong & deep-rooted & they define us: & we'll defend them vigorously.

All this leads us to our 2 passages today: because this all happened centuries ago: the people involved were living in a different time, but really weren't that different from us: & the message in both passages was: 'what was God thinking?'; 'no all-knowing God (who subscribes to the world order as I know it) would ever consider...

In the passage from Jonah, it was the prophet himself. In the passage from Luke, it was the crowd: (the religious, synagogue crowd).

At the beginning of Jonah, the prophet received simple instructions from God: 'go to Nineveh, that great city & call out against it for their evil has come up before me'.

God had chosen Jonah, & no doubt brought him along for this mission of change: (He had a plan of love to save (not to reject or give up on) the people of this vast & sinful city; & He had a plan of love for Jonah too): quite an honour to receive simple, clear instructions from God Himself: yet Jonah couldn't yet process or accept what God was asking him to do, because his opinion about what to do with the people of Nineveh & God's, were at odds: yet God wasn't going to let him off the hook & take 'no' for an answer. Chapter 1 says: Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord: funny? Jonah's issue: God had a loving plan to deliver the people of Nineveh from their sinful ways & Jonah (who thought he knew better), took issue with it: they don't deserve this & I'm not going to do it: get someone else: God's plan conflicted with Jonah's beliefs: he didn't know what God was thinking, so he left & left God to it, so to speak.

>God didn't abandon Jonah or the Ninevites: Jonah needed some training: some time away to think; some 'in-servicing': & he got it: after 3 days & nights in the fish, Jonah prayed: I called out to the Lord, out of my distress & He answered me: God didn't disown Jonah, in spite of thinking he knew better; in spite of attempting to flee from God's presence: for everyone: being far from God, emotionally is never the best plan: & God doesn't flee from us: behold, I stand at the door: your door & knock: constantly: & I send messengers to knock too.

It is interesting to note that the name of the city: Nineveh: is connected to the ancient Babylonian/Akkadian word for fish: & the people of Nineveh worshipped a fish goddess, among others. Maybe modern-day Jonah's would spend three days & nights in a bank vault.

Fast forward to Chapter 3: The word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time saying: Arise, go to Nineveh that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you: so Jonah arose & went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord: he obeyed God & His best-laid plan: which achieved its desired outcome: when God saw what they did; how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he was going to do to them: Thy will be done: not Jonah's. God's values: not Jonah's or ours. Why not just do it the first time? A great life of

faith comes with shortening the time-lines between the assignment & getting to it.

Just prior to our passage from Luke, Jesus was having his own time-away: a sort of training camp: being tempted & tested for 40 days by satan. Jesus, unlike Jonah, had no problem with the will of His Father, yet still needed preparation for what God had in store for him: short-term & long-term. Here, it is the people whose beliefs & opinions are at odds with God's best-laid plans.

Verse 14: 'Jesus begins his ministry': Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee & a report about Him went out through all the surrounding country; & he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. Great beginning to His new job: can we identify: training, first job: we're going to own this: we're going to succeed like nobody else.

But then, the clash of opinions & values: Jesus returned to his hometown: as was His custom. What is it with hometowns & families: greatest allies or not: in this case not: He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath: verses 18 – 30.

Wow. This 'boy' saying all this in the synagogue: God has & will reach out & save/heal people outside of the circle of His chosen people before He acts with some of them!

This hometown boy saying stuff like this: blasphemy! So in modern parlance they, the people/the religious leaders, sought to 'throw him under the bus'; 'ride him out on the rails': the passage says they sought to throw him off the cliff. But they didn't: this situation was part of God's plan for Him, but not the final part. We may wonder from the reaction of the assembly: How many messages & messengers from God do we shut out & miss because what we need can't possibly come from this or that source? So we're not open to them or to the possibilities.

Imagine at the beginning of your first job, you say something controversial in a meeting; you rock the boat: & your colleagues conspire to throw you off a cliff or a pier! Jesus might say: 'you want to complain about your job/calling/mission'?

Jesus knew what His mission, His job was going to be like: short & long-term: and yet He did it with focus & love. He wasn't short with people & didn't require some sort of therapy to deal with doing a job He knew would eventually get Him killed.

Jesus knew many things: including the fact that God's grace & salvation are for all: not just for a chosen few. Jonah thought the people of Nineveh didn't deserve God's grace; the people of Nazareth didn't think the Gentiles did either. But God's perfect, loving, best-laid plan says otherwise: & he calls people like us to be open to this idea & make it happen. We too could have ideas or a list of people who 'don't deserve God's salvation' & there may be some merit to consider: but God's ultimate plan is to draw everyone to Himself: through His instruments: us.

We can understand or not understand God's call on us. We can have opinions which do not further God's kingdom. We can ignore God's voice & leading, but a full life of faith happens when we don't: we & those we interact with come closer to God, when we don't: when we don't try to analyze everything; when we realize that the ways of our Lord: His timing & training program are mostly beyond our understanding & we should just go with His leading: His small or sometimes loud voice.

Speak Lord, for your servant is listening. Lead me Jesus, I will follow. May Thy will be done. In the words of Eli, last week: He is God.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart & lean not on your own understanding: in all your ways acknowledge Him & He shall direct your paths.

The best-laid plans for mice, men, & us: are God's.

Amen.