

I'd like to ask you to imagine that there is a person standing in a maze, it could be you, it could be me, it could be a faceless person. They stand in a clearing with several paths around them, leading in different directions. The clearing they are standing in has a sign in it that reads, 'my soul waits for the Lord.'

But this person is feeling a bit unsettled having read this strange gospel passage that speaks in riddles, names an unforgivable sin, and seems to devalue family. So for this moment they cannot just sit with 'my soul waits for the Lord.'

So they decide to set off and explore one of the paths. As they walk down the path, the gospel passage seems to unfold before their eyes; they catch glimpses of Jesus and his friends surrounded by people, again - surely it's not long since Jesus had to get into a boat to escape the crowds, with the unclean spirits shouting after him: you are the Son of God. The person sees his companions try to urge Jesus to eat, to stop and rest for a moment, he needs to eat. There is a sense of frustration, there are too many people, not enough time to care for basic needs of food and rest.

The atmosphere has subtly changed, the crowd are growing restless, they don't understand what they hear from Jesus, what they have seen him do...and so they listen to those they consider experts as they spread the word that Jesus is evil, he is the ruler of evil, and it is because of this that he seems to have authority over people's sickness and unclean spirits.

The person walks on down the path and hears Jesus reply to the scribes directly, confronting them, not speaking to the side, to others as these scribes have done - Jesus has nothing to hide. You hear a bit of frustration in Jesus' voice as he says, 'how can Satan cast out himself?' It doesn't make sense! If a kingdom fights within itself, there is nothing anyone else needs to do, but watch that kingdom fall. If anything fights itself then cracks will appear that can cause a collapse - this applies to countries, families, workplaces, even churches.

The person moves forwards a few steps and is confronted with an image of a strong man being tied up in his own home. Wait, what? We've gone from Satan fighting himself, a kingdom fighting in a civil war, and now we have a strong man tied up in his home. A bit odd....

They take another step forward and suddenly the image changes and John the Baptist is there, in the desert, dressed strangely and speaking to the crowds about the one who is to come after him. He says: 'The one who is more powerful than I, stronger than I, is coming. You think I am great, I'm not even worthy of untying his sandals.'

Oh, so Jesus is the stronger one? Jesus, who went into the desert and was tempted by Satan, by evil, and resisted - the stronger one.

The image of the strong man tied up now makes a bit more sense - Jesus is stronger than the strong man. The balance of the world is changing, Jesus has come and is binding evil, taking away its power.

As that image fades, the person moves forward a few steps, only to find that the path has led them back to the clearing with the sign that says, 'my soul waits for the Lord'. The person feels they can sit with that a bit longer now - Jesus is the stronger one, whatever is disturbing their soul.

But there are other paths and they decide to take a look at another one. A few steps in and there is that unsettling feeling again. You hear Jesus say, 'whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven.' What does that mean?

Then as they keep on walking, the person hears Paul begin to speak as if he is reading his second letter to the Corinthians: 'we have the same spirit of faith. we believe and we can say this because we know that God raised Jesus from the dead, and can raise us from death to life too.'

So it's the Spirit that inspires faith and belief. The Spirit that reveals what God has done through Jesus. So perhaps blaspheming against the Holy Spirit is to block the revelation of God in the world; to hinder the Spirit working to bring people to faith, to hope; to stifle the creativity of the Spirit moving through the world and in our lives.

Then the person hears Jesus speak again: Who are my mother and my brothers? Here are my mother and my brothers.

Is Jesus just being rude? Or could it be that Jesus wants us to think beyond the boundaries of this world, just as he did when he challenged the was of the sabbath: the sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath. Could it be that the Spirit allows us to see beyond the restraints we put on ourselves to be creative about how we see others, how we see worship, how we see faith?

The Spirit brings faith and hope in eternal life - life that is more than this worldly life, life forever in the love of God.

As the person emerges from that path of the maze they find themselves once more back in the clearing with the sign: My soul waits for the Lord.

My soul waits for the Lord, the stronger one, as the Spirit leads me on, into faith. Ok, the person can dwell on this, wait on the Lord for a bit, think about eternal life.

And that's great, but surely there is more to this faith that just waiting for eternal life?

There is still another path to explore, let's take another walk. As the person steps into this path, they hear words being spoken, but they are 2 sets of words at the same time, difficult to make out.

They stop and listen and gradually recognise the 2 sets of words, intermingled with one another:

our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

Our Father, who art in heaven

inner nature renewed day by day

hallowed be your name

renewed day by day

your kingdom come, your will be done

renewed day by day

on earth AS IT IS in heaven

renewed day by day

give us today our daily bread

renewed day by day

Wait: your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven - so the kingdom where Jesus has overcome the strong man, because he is the stronger one, can be the same on earth as it is in heaven? In heaven where we hope for eternal life? That can be the same here on earth - is that what we are praying for - life on earth that is eternal life now?

The person continues walking this path with the words echoing in their mind: our inner nature is being renewed day by day: on earth as it is in heaven.

And suddenly they find themselves right back in the clearing again. My soul waits for the Lord.

My soul waits for the Lord, the stronger one. As the Spirit leads me on into faith, and as I learn day by day that the promise of life is not just for when our earthly bodies die, but is for here on earth, just as it is in heaven - life in the love of God. My soul waits for the Lord.

And so the person stands in the clearing, with the sign in front of them, knowing that it all leads back to the same place, the place where Jesus has defeated evil once and for all, where the Spirit leads us on into faith, and where we pray for life on earth to be like life in heaven.

When they realise this, the person really can sit with the words: My soul waits for the Lord.