

[Day #18] Part 3: No Graven Image – Obedience is The Highest Service

Read: Ps. 46:10; 95:6-7; 115:3

Elisabeth Elliot eventually wrote an autobiography of her first year as a missionary. The book, called *These Strange Ashes*, recounts some of the heartbreaking losses marking that year for both her and her future husband, Jim Elliot.

Elisabeth and Jim had surrendered their lives to missionary service, but at the end of that year they felt it was all a waste. Elisabeth spent her year learning an unwritten language, in which she hoped to one day translate the Bible. But every note and language card was lost! Then her language helper, the only person on earth fluent in both languages she needed, was brutally murdered! As for Jim, he spent the year felling trees and making boards for a building project, but every last board was carried away in a flood!

What a waste that year of their life seemed! Or had it been?

Elliot ends her book with an apocryphal story well-known to the early church, indicating that they, too, struggled with “graven images,” i.e. reconciling the God of their minds with the God of reality.

The story goes like this:

One day Jesus said to His disciples, “I’d like you to carry a stone for me.” So the disciples each went to find a stone. Peter, being the practical sort, looked for a small stone – after all, Jesus hadn’t specified about size. With the stone in his pocket, Peter joined the others and off they went when Jesus said, “Follow me.”

A few hours later they were hungry. Jesus waved His hand over them, and behold! Their stones became bread! Peter’s little bit of lunch was consumed in a minute, and there he sat, waiting for the others to finish.

Lunch over, Jesus made the same request and off the disciples went in search of another rock. This time Peter got it! He returned to the group with a boulder-size rock just as Jesus said, “Follow me.” All afternoon Peter struggled to carry the boulder, but looked forward to his payoff at dinner. The sun neared the horizon just as they reached the sea. There Jesus said, “Now, throw your stone into the sea.”

Peter and the others looked at him dumbfounded. Jesus sighed and said, “Don’t you remember what I asked you to do? For whom were you carrying the stone?”

For whom do we carry the stone?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

In this apocryphal story*, how was Peter's "obedience" actually self-serving?

Give examples of ways that, sometimes, our obedience to God might also be self-serving.

While we can never fully know our deepest motives, how can we avoid the example of Peter in this story, following instead the example of John?

**possibly used for instruction in the early Church*