

Friends

On the 14th of July 1865, the British climber, Edward Whymper reached the top of the Matterhorn – the first ever to do so. He was part of a team of six and it was his eighth attempt. The upward ascent was surprisingly easy, but after an hour of enjoying the magnificent view under a wind-whipped shirt (they had forgotten to bring a flag!) the group decided it was time to turn homeward. On the way down, things were much tougher, and the mountaineers roped themselves together. When one slipped, the back three, Whymper and two guides, were able to secure themselves. The front four however had no chance when the rope snapped, and they went sliding down the mountain to their deaths.

The event was seen as the end of the “golden age of Alpinism” which up until then had seen very few deaths. Thus the great achievement became also the great ending, although such is human nature that when Queen Victoria, who had lost a relative in the accident, declared that no-one of royal blood should attempt the climb ever again, every Tom, Dick and Harry wanted to have a go at the previously unconquerable mountain.

Why did they climb it? There is something is there not, about going somewhere where others have never been, climbing something that is so difficult that when you get there, you really know you have done something?

In the story of the Tower of Babel, told in Genesis 11:1-9, humans wanted to climb all the way to heaven. Building a tower that they hoped would reach to God, they were struck down: the tower broken, the people scattered and for the first time, they spoke multiple languages, so that it was harder for people to understand each other. Perhaps we have always longed for the heights in one way or another.

The faithful following of a path of simple, loving discipleship is not a glamorous climb, but a hard slog. Following, fully following, the way of Christ, demands that we test each step: Is this truly loving? Does it exclude anyone? Is it at odds with what I understand the Bible to say? If so, what do others say

that the Bible means when it says this thing? There is risk, but there is also joy and whatever happens, for good or for ill, we can know that while we remain tethered to the Lord, the rope that holds us will never break.

God bless, Vicci