

You will know by now that my great metaphor for life is that it is a Journey. I believe the metaphor you hold in your mind for life matters a great deal. Some have the metaphor of a race, some of a battle, some that life is like a great big onion as Marvin Gaye and Tammi Turrel sang! But how you view life determines how you act and the choices you make in your life.

I believe the metaphor of life as a Journey is one rooted in Christian teaching and stories. There are so many journey's in the Bible that we cannot mention them this morning but perhaps have a think for yourselves after Sunday lunch. Advent is of course built on the idea of journeying .. slowly but surely moving from week to week from candle to candle until we reach our destination of Christmas. The other church seasons are the same in a perhaps less obvious ways.

This morning we are reminded in our Scripture passages that there are smaller journeys within our life which occur time and time again. They are shorter and repetitive journeys which represent the movement from darkness to light, from death to life, from the desert to promised land, struggle to victory.

Consider the passage in Samuel where King David is told God has given him rest from all his enemies. His people are now at peace after a prolonged journey of fighting and being without a permanent home in the land. Now God tells David after living in tents and carrying the ark of the covenant around with you .. now after all your hardship ... I will establish your kingdom and you will build your throne. It is a message which resounds throughout the Old Testament ... from Abram being called out of Harran to start a journey towards a new world for him and his offspring. To Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt to the Promised Land. The Journey from darkness to light, from wandering to rest is at the heart of each individual and each community that seeks to follow God.

The New Testament reading gives us the same message of course. It starts with the words 'Mary was greatly troubled by these words'. The start of Mary's journey was full of fear and anxiety. She was given good news but it came with strife and challenge. And we know it was not to be the only time such a journey was required. Time and again Mary was faced with a promise of light out of darkness, victory out of strife. The final journey of Jesus to the cross was made with ary weeping and cut to the heart as the promise that her son 'would reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end'.

Why is it important for us to see a pattern in these stories? Why is it important for us today to take note that Mary's journey was through both valleys and mountains as the peace of christ was born into the world. Why is it important that the Good News of the birth of Mary's child was followed by the bad news that she would have to make a long uncomfortable and unsettling journey on the back of a donkey? Why is it important that the hope of the Promised Land is always given to us first in the desert?

This morning now more than ever we must embrace the deep truth that the journey is just as important as the destination. Indeed that the destination is somehow shaped and achieved through the journey. That without the times of darkness there is no need for rest. That without the times of hardship there is no need for rest. That without the times of battle there is no need for peace. One comes through the other in a circular journey which does not end. Is it possible that true peace is to be found not in a destination but in finding trust that the journey is one which has growth and renewal at its heart. That first Advent Mary was told her journey would bring peace to the world. But we now know that peace was never going to be achieved in her journey alone. It was a peace that would become available to every person that ever lived .. but only through us making our own journey.

This year has been a journey. We have not travelled far in a physical sense. But we have travelled a long way in our hearts and minds. We have known questions and fears and anxieties that we never knew we could experience. We have fought with our enemies and spent time in our own deserts. And we can be certain that we will in due course be led into a place of peace .. a promised land as it were. We will know freedoms and opportunities again that we had forgotten were possible. And at the heart of this experience is the Christian journey which tells us that from struggle comes rest, from darkness comes light from sorrow comes joy. And that this is a never ending journey which calls us to grow and learn and become more than we are. I want to finish with a poem about Joy and Sorrow which reminds us that it is in both we find our true worth. From the sorrow of this year we will journey to a joy we never imagined possible if we place our hand in our Saviours and walk on in faith!

Then a woman said, Speak to us of Joy and Sorrow. And he answered:

Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.

And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears. And how else can it be?

The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.

Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven?

And is not the lute that soothes your spirit, the very wood that was hollowed with knives?

When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy. When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.

Some of you say, "Joy is greater than sorrow," and others say, "Nay, sorrow is the greater." But I say unto you, they are inseparable. Together they come, and when one sits alone with you at your desk, remember that the other is asleep upon your bed.