

Intro: Motivation to Journey

When I were young and in the scouts, we used to do loads of hikes. We'd hike to a camp site about 7 or so miles away, to camp for one or two nights. Sometimes we'd go on night hikes which were always extra fun and we even entered as hiking competition for the local area of scouts and won it!

To share a couple of memories from them, one was from a night hike where many of the scouts began complaining about how much their feet and legs ached as we were on the route back to the scout hut.

'It's ok, we'll get hot chocolate and snacks when we get back, our leader said, and then you can get cosy to sleep in your sleeping bags.'

Many of the scouts replied, 'Nah, I'll just collapse straight in and sleep'.

So, once we got back, with everyone breathing a sigh of relief, the troop all collapsed onto their sleeping bags and settled down... not! As soon as we got back into the warm, lit scout hut all of them were renewed with energy and various types of pillow fight and active games ensued!

On another occasion, one of those trips to the local campsite by an indirect route, we'd got ourselves all set up with a little radio to play some tunes on the way and the weather looked fairly good, a bit cloudy and a forecast of some scattered showers, so nothing that bothered us. An hour into the hike it began to rain heavily – 'oh they didn't say the scattered showers would be this heavy, but at least it will pass over and stop soon.'

It was still raining when we reached the campsite! 'So much for scattered showers we said, the clouds must have been following our route!'

The hikes where we'd had good weather and lots of fun on route were great – like stopping off at a village shop to buy baby food which was a 'can you survive a hike only on baby food challenge' and another where we wondered how many cream eggs we could manage in one go. And by the way, it's not as many cream eggs as you might think before a young scout gets to see it again!

But those hikes where the weather turned bad or we got lost and ended up walking further for longer, well if we'd known it before we started, we might not have wanted to go. Part of the job of the patrol leaders, as I was in those stories, was to encourage the others and keep them motivated.

We would never get ready for a hike, boots checked, kit checked and then say 'right – this is going to be a terrible experience. On this hike you'll get blisters, sore shoulders, aching legs, totally drenched and at least one of you will lose a boot in a thick, muddy puddle.'

'Er, scouts... where have they all gone?

Christian discipleship is often talked about in terms of a journey. Like the positive examples I gave about the scouts, we talk of the benefits of journeying with Jesus. We tell the stories of the amazing things Jesus did and does for many of his followers still today and, though we say

the road will be tough at times. Referring to Psalm 23 and the valley of the shadow of death, we say, it's ok, the Lord will be with you through it and out the other end.

For Palm Sunday we are celebrating Jesus' triumphal procession into Jerusalem with the crowds cheering him on. So, let's drop in on Jesus' pep-talk to the disciples when they set out on that exciting journey to Jerusalem:

The Prequel:

20 ¹⁷ Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, ¹⁸ 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death ¹⁹ and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!'

'Whaaat!' It's no wonder that on a previous occasion Peter has tried to stop Jesus from journeying back to Jerusalem where he knew the chief leaders wanted to have Jesus stoned. (Mark 9:32). According to Matthew this is the fourth time Jesus told them this and on this occasion the disciples resolved to go with him, despite the gloomy prediction, though a motivating promise is also given, 'on the third day he will be raised to life!'

Q: What about us? When we find ourselves in the valley of the shadow of death, when the path of following Jesus has become really difficult, what do we do?

Sit down & sulk? Give up and go back to the old road? Or are we determined to see it through to being raised to life?

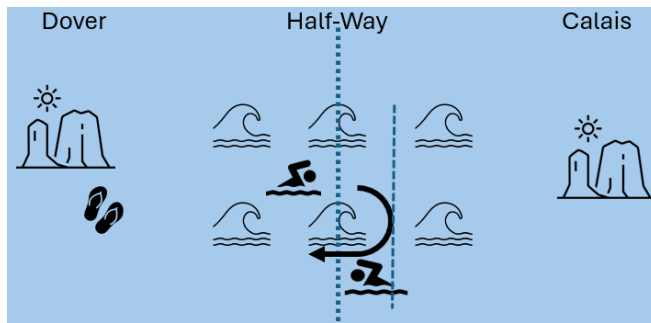
To give up and go back to the old road is like this:

There was a maths teacher who announced to his class that this weekend he was going to be swimming across the English Channel, setting out at Dover. He done his training, in both the local swimming pool and swimming along some of the cost to get used to swimming gin the sea, and so now he was ready to do the big swim!

When he came back to school the next week the class wanted to know how he'd got on. Had he avoided the cross-channel ferries? Had he seen any seals? What was it like walking up the beach in France? Had he remembered his passport?

Lots of excited questions!

'Ah, I had a problem' replied the maths teacher, 'I had just got past the half-way point when one of my legs cramped up in the cold water and so I had to turn around and swim back to Dover.' ... (picture) ...



The discipleship road – giving up when things get tough is also to forget the truth in this saying, ‘the end of the tunnel is always closer than you think.’

The discipleship road... the good news is that when we wonder off the path with Jesus, he can get us back on it... but we will have taken extra time and perhaps have gone through some unnecessary pain to learn that lesson.

Sit down & Sulk?

Back in the day Elijah did that. He didn’t like the road he was on for it brought him into opposition with Jezebel. He ran away and when he was too tired, he sat down and sulked.

If you’re one of those whose discipleship journey is stalled, or perhaps you’ve not really gone far at all and are just going through the motions of discipleship, then you’re in good company with Elijah at that point in his life. He was well on with his discipleship journey, had decided to run off the path, but not having or wanting a secular life to return to, he just stopped.

The Lord met him, nourished him and then re-encouraged him.

By all means sit and sulk, for this is to acknowledge the problem, but do it in the church community where the Lord will meet and nourish you though his family, restarting your journey. To isolate oneself is tempting but is a temptation to resist. Soon we will have a specific space during the week where people can come and without needing to give any explanation or have to try and figure anything out, they can be in a place where it is ok not to be ok. That space is available on a Sunday too; we have a small pastoral meeting room where it is quieter and, where one of the Pastoral Well being team can come sit with you for a bit, to offer the Lord’s nourishment when you’re ready.

At various points on the road to life, we all need to stop and rest, even if we’re not in a sulk! That’s ok, it’s a part of what church family are about.

Or, how about the ‘sticking it out’ What might that look like?

Let’s find out, through Jesus reaching Jerusalem:

Jesus comes to Jerusalem as king,

21 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, ‘Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to

me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.'

⁴ This took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet: ⁵ 'Say to Daughter Zion, "See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!'

'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' 'Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

¹⁰ When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, 'Who is this?'

Palm Sunday: At last, after that extended prelude of journey we reach Palm Sunday. 'Hosanna to the Son of David, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'

And what a contrast to the disciples first expectations!

They knew the chief leaders were unhappy with what Jesus was teaching and wanted to find a way to silence him.

They knew Jesus has said himself that those leaders would get their way.

Among the crowds were those with an underlying complaint of Roman occupation. Perhaps their mantra was, 'Make Israel great again' and so theirs was a political cry.

Others had witnessed or heard of Jesus' miracle on the way up to Jerusalem; of Lazarus being raised from the dead; or the blind men receiving sight, and they wanted more of these!

And wow! The people's reaction is an outpouring of their inner selves – even if they did not know their spiritual thirst for the water of life.

They did not understand that Jesus' coming was not about the physical kingdom of the Jews, but the Kingdom of Heaven coming for all peoples, starting with the Jews.

Underlining that point, Jesus comes in on a donkey; not as overthrower to the Roman kingdom but as the Prince of Peace for all peoples.

And folks, it is still true today that people have a thirst for the water of life, even if that thirst is unconscious to them or their motivation has some problems. They are things that the Lord can transform in his followers.

There's another little picture here, of the donkey and colt. Leon Morris points out that because the colt had never been ridden, the donkey was probably the mother, helping the colt to be calm, especially when Jesus is riding through noisy crowds.ⁱ

The Journey to Jerusalem, Matt.20:17-19; 21:1-10

I like his thought about this for it chimes well with the church as the daughter of God, being guided by a parent. There may be noise and clamour all around, but do not fear, The Lord is here.

Say it with me, 'There may be noise and clamour all around, but do not fear, The Lord is here.'

Say it when you're struggling with life, say it when you notice the Lord's hand at work, say it when you don't but say it! There may be noise and clamour all around, but do not fear, The Lord is here.'

The reading finished with the question, '**Who is this?**'

So many people just don't know. Even some Christians get the basics but don't fully discover who Jesus is, thinking that once they've learnt about what he did, that's it. The disciples travelled with Jesus for around 3-years, and they were still figuring him out.

In truth it takes a lifetime to be discovering who Jesus is, and to join in the work he is still doing. So how about it, will you journey with him?

Hosanna in the Highest Heaven, Hosanna to the King, the son of David and the Lord who I will follow!

ⁱ Leon Morris, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p.522.