

Journey

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Numbers 13²⁵⁻³³ / Luke 13³¹⁻³⁵

It's the New Year! I hope you celebrated well friends. I hope the New Year brings you blessing and peace. I hope, indeed, that we here at Leith may know a blessed New Year. This, however, raises the question of just what 'being blessed' means. What does it mean for you? Will it mean some simple material pleasures, better pay, better things, better prospects generally? Or do we view other things as more important? Do we hope for better relationships, better family times, better friendships? And it's not wrong to hope for these things or, indeed, even for material blessing. The Israelites as they travelled from Egypt towards the Promised Land hoped for both. They were after a land 'flowing with milk and honey' **and** they were after a land not dominated by a judicial system which was unjust and racially prejudiced. They were after a Land in which each person could live on the basis of their own merit and their own standing before God. **But none of this could happen while they were still in Egypt.**

The journey out of Egypt stands now for the whole Jewish and Christian tradition as a metaphor for political and spiritual freedom. It stands for a people on the road to maturity, on the road to adulthood, on the road to true personal and communal

growth. And there are many lessons to be taken from this journey. But one lesson is fundamental and it is this – to achieve these things one must be prepared to ‘Go!’ one must be prepared to ‘journey!’

So I ask this question of us today – are we prepared to journey? Are prepared to leave what we know and go somewhere where, perhaps not everything is different – but many things are? Are we prepared to leave the comfortable and the familiar behind and to follow God?

I spoke about journey for the first time several weeks ago but I want to revisit the theme today because I believe it is so important for us – and let me explain why?

One of the enduring memories I have from my childhood is of our Christmas holidays. Every Christmas till I was about 15 years old our family based as it was in Dunedin would have to make the trek north to Hastings to visit with and celebrate Christmas with my father’s parents. They were an interesting couple. He was an Englishman who’d emigrated here as a young man and who, through dint of hard work and persistence had managed to buy a small property on the outskirts of Hastings on which he planted an orchard. It was an inspired decision in the 30’s I’m sure and one which kept his family fed for 40 years. She, on the other hand, was the daughter of a Presbyterian Missionary who’d worked in Africa in Old Calabar which was a City State in what is now south eastern Nigeria. He’d worked there for some

years before succumbing almost completely to Malaria and having to move to Australia and then New Zealand to recover from its effects. He ministered down south here for quite a few years before moving to the Nelson area where upon the Malaria reoccurred and he died within several months of moving.

By the time I came around my paternal Grandfather was an old man having not had children till he was well into his 40's. He was over 70 before my memory forms a picture of him. He was still working the orchard then but he would lease it out by the time I was 10 years old. Still, we had the joy of visiting them for 3 or so weeks every summer and so I got the completely wrong idea of a New Zealand summer by being in Hastings for 3 weeks every year. And every year we'd get sunburned and overheated and hard hard feet. But I digress for what I really want to talk about is **getting there**.

You see going to Hastings involved was can only be described as a journey; a journey which began some weeks prior to our leave date with a discussion about how to get there. Only twice can I remember not driving up to Christchurch to catch the Ferry across to Wellington and then driving on to Hawkes Bay. On those occasions we had to fly. Every other time involved a significant preparation time, packing, planning, repacking, complaining... did I mention packing? Days before we left, the journey became everything. All energies were focused on getting away on time and not forgetting anything. Most years

we got away late and we forgot something but it was generally not fatal.

Three things defined those adventures. The first was that within about 2 or 3 days of the journey, it dominated our reality – nothing else mattered and that was a tremendous thing for a boy whose general school history was one which was best forgotten – at least at times. All the ringing of hands about the trouble I was in, the work not done to a high enough standard, the teachers offended, the capital punishment endured, the fights, the crimes, the constantly surprised parents – all this was history once the journey was entered into. The journey became everything. Getting there became what mattered.

Jesus calls us into a journey – together. It's important to have a sense of what that calling is because it is an incredibly important part of our salvation. We are saved, you see, **for a purpose** and the purpose is to get on the road with Jesus – to partner with Him on the journey – to travel with Him. As we face this New Year can I ask you to ask Jesus – where he wants you to go.

The second thing about those journeys was that on every occasion to undergo the journey we had to entertain the notion and reality of the unknown. Despite meticulous planning, list upon list, packing and repacking and the adoption of new technology such as special roof racks and new cars – **always and every time** – something out of the ordinary happened. Children

got lost, parents became separated from each other at crucial times, camping gear went flying off a poorly tied roof rack and bounced unceremoniously down the Kilmog – it took about half an hour to recover it all from the bush on the side of the road and retie it again – my brother at 18 months old managed to fall into a swollen Manawatu River in Palmerston North one year and was rescued by dad floating head down in time to save his life – milkshakes were spilled leaving the car to smell of vomit for weeks afterwards, boats would be late, delayed, slow, terribly rough – (there's nothing like 5 people all vomiting together to make for a wonderful memory) cars would break down, you name it – we faced it and yet... **there was nothing like that journey for creating fun and a sense of togetherness.** The unknown was sometimes good, more often bad but somehow life, real life, good life, strong life – flowed through it. More than anything else, however, we learned the joy of leaving the harbour – leaving the safety of the safe place and tasting the joys of trusting ourselves to a greater reality.

Do we want to really taste life? Do we really want to help others taste life? Then get on the journey! Start now, decide now to be in on this together – to come with us as we follow Jesus together. You know I can almost guarantee something will go wrong but the life you will experience will just blow your mind. Corrie Ten Boom – a most amazing Christian who went through the Nazi death camps and watched her whole family killed yet

forgave her captors says this about the journey... “Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.” This is where life is folks – it’s with Jesus on the road to wherever He’s going.

The third thing about journey was that it created opportunities for us all to grow up. When all your energies are suddenly focused towards one end and it’s a place you all want to go then every bit of help to get there is appreciated and, indeed, required. The usual boundaries around things like who’s an adult and who’s a child become blurred because even a child can do something, carry something, lift something, hold something, count something, help with something! Those sort of barriers matter less on a journey because whatever each person can contribute to getting a little further down the road really counts. One of my most significant ‘growing up’ experiences occurred when Dad had to be delayed in his trip to Hastings and since the booking were already made mum had to drive us all the way up and onto the Ferry. Dad assured me before I left that I was now charged with mum’s care and I had to also look after my brother and sister. Well I can tell you I was a little bit worried for them and very worried about mum knowing that she hadn’t showed any inclination in the past to cope with this journey. Furthermore I didn’t think she was inclined to listen to me about anything. And yet, it happened. Mum suddenly began to defer to me a little – ask my advice –

explain what she was doing... to me! I suddenly counted and though it was a little scary I knew that from then on something had shifted in our relationship with each other. I was suddenly thrust into a very adult role and though nothing too bad happened I certainly became very aware of all the potential issues and problems and was extremely relieved to arrive at my grandparent's place in one piece.

Every one of us needs to grow. We need to become adults as Christians but how do we do this? We do it by getting on the journey because once you're on the road you will be asked to do things you never thought you would do – you'll be asked to feed 5000 people with just a few loaves and fishes; you'll be asked to produce wine for a party you weren't even planning on going to; you'll be asked to heal a man born paralysed; you'll be asked to understand the incomprehensible – the will of God in the midst of the apparent triumph of evil – the death of friends, family, dreams and desires. **Yet here is life – eternal life amidst the ruins of this life. This is where God is and frankly you don't want to be anywhere else.**

How do we get on the road with Jesus? I think we just ask him to take us there. We sign up. We say, here I am Jesus, use me! Who wants to do this? Who want to join me in Following Christ? Then let's pray together that we might find ourselves on the road with Jesus this year.