

## WELCOME 16<sup>th</sup> July 2023 – 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost '23 A

Exodus 13:17-14:31

**Welcome!** It's great to be together again today! Word is Pastor John is home & recovering...we'll keep praying for Leonie. Eventually he'll be back but in the meantime... **Growing Praise** inserts are still there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & so you can share that w/ someone else. **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups** will be on hold until John gets back in front of his computer in about a month or so. But they will be back.

### **As we move into this week...**

"Baby steps" "One day at a time" "How do you eat an elephant?" "One bite at a time" We know the clichés. We're familiar with the understanding that much of life can only be experienced in moment-by-moment segments. We get it that we're not privileged to know the outcomes of tomorrow until we get there.

It's precisely that uncertainty that breeds our anxieties. It is precisely in the unknown or unknowable where our fears multiply.

But what is assured in all the uncertainty & unknown of life is that we live & move & have our very existence enveloped in the presence, protection & provision of the Father. God is always **WITH** us & forever **FOR** us & He will not leave you to wander alone.

**The** Lord went ahead of them. He guided them during the day with a pillar of cloud, & he provided light at night with a pillar of fire. This allowed them to travel by day or by night. The Lord did not remove the pillar of cloud or pillar of fire from its place in front of the people.

The path God leads is a life in communion with him and worship of him. From him every blessing flows.

Let's pray...

## PRAYER OF THE DAY

*Father you call us as your own & release us into this world for your purposes. Let every thought word & deed be held firm in your grace. Make our worship today & our lives in all things a reflection of your mission to this world & the path ahead for this band of disciples one that invites others into your life & love. Amid challenges & changes equip us by your Spirit for whatever tasks you have set for us. Infuse your wisdom into our hearts so that we discern your will & way in all things for your glory & the widened embrace of your kingdom in this city...through Jesus we pray...Amen.*

*Let's hear God's word...*

## **7 PENTECOST '23 A – A JOURNEY OF PROMISE: WALKING IN THE PROMISE**

The announcement came out of nowhere: "It's been 50 days since I had a drop of alcohol." I don't know him well, except through his well-run business, but he was elated & I instantly shared his joy. Whatever caused this massive life transformation I don't know...don't need to...but I **DO KNOW** on **THAT** journey you count the days one...by...one & you celebrate each one as it comes & then passes behind you. And the temptation to literally go back to where you started is *HUUUGE*. There is always a reason to undo those days. Always.

The human fight-flight-or-freeze instinct seems slanted toward "flight," retreat, give up, & go back. God knows that: **When** Pharaoh finally let God's people go, God did not lead them along the main road that runs through Philistine territory, even though that was the shortest route to the Promised Land. God said, "If the people are faced with a battle, they might change their minds & return to Egypt." So God led them in a roundabout way through the wilderness toward the Red Sea.

Faced with a battle, too often we change our minds & return to Egypt...retreat into an old slavery...give in to an old lifestyle...re-establish an old habit...Faced with a battle or confronted with challenges, obstacles, difficulties, or dangers...when the price of freedom is too high...the cost of discipline too great...if giving up the known is too scary...obedience too overwhelming...slavery is a familiar route & routine. God knows that about the Israelites & about each one of us. We are...all of us but one decision from an old slavery. I love the next bit...So God led them in a roundabout way through the wilderness toward the Red Sea. So God led them forward like a sailboat tacking against the wind...or like climbing a tall mountain by using the switchbacks. God led them forward by zig-zags...

A few weeks back we made the observation that sometimes the "process doesn't look much like progress." Forward by zig-zags would have to qualify in my mind as one of those times. But let's be clear on just what "forward" means *TO GOD*. Zig-zags is in fact headed somewhere: **Therefore**, say to the people of Israel: 'I am Yahweh. I will free you from your oppression & I will rescue you from your slavery in Egypt. I will redeem you with a powerful arm & great acts of judgment. I will claim you as my own people, & I will be your God. Then you will know that I am Yahweh your God who has freed you from your oppression in Egypt.' – Ex 6:6-8 Freedom. Rescue. Salvation. Identity. Their own land. A real restored Relationship with Yahweh. Forward by zig-zags is the path God lays out to lead his people to his heart...into the unbroken unbreakable reality of his intimate presence.

But rather than some distant far-off far-away destination...**The** Lord went ahead of them. He guided them during the day with a pillar of cloud, & he provided light at night with

a pillar of fire. This allowed them to travel by day or by night. The Lord did not remove the pillar of cloud or pillar of fire from its place in front of the people. The unbroken unbreakable reality of the Father's intimate presence is now...St Patrick, yep the Irish saint, is said to have prayed himself into each day & each missionary excursion with a long prayer that gave evidence of his deep devotion to Christ & his soul-satisfying reliance on just that sort of intimacy. It reads in part: *Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down...Christ when I arise, Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me.* The unbroken unbreakable reality of the Father's intimate presence is now. **I will claim you as my own people, & I will be your God**...The Lord did not remove the pillar of cloud or pillar of fire from its place in front of the people.

But in the forward by zig-zags journey...walking in the presence & promise of God, God's enemies as well as God's people mistake forward by zig-zags for being adrift, for being lost, for being trapped, for being at risk...as an excuse to give up... **Then** the Lord gave these instructions to Moses: "Order the Israelites to turn back & camp by Pi-hahiroth between Migdol & the sea. Camp there along the shore, across from Baal-zephon. Then Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are confused. They are trapped in the wilderness!'"

Sure enough...when Pharaoh realizes that 600K able-bodied slaves just walked out the gates of Egypt with a whole bunch of loot to go along with them...he musters his army to chase those whom he thinks are "entangled" in the wilderness. He sees their forward by zig-zags journey like an animal trying to escape a cage. They're boxed in & confused...lost & wandering aimlessly with no clear route to their escape. He's not alone in that mistaken impression. **As** Pharaoh approached, the people of Israel looked up & panicked when they saw the Egyptians overtaking them. They cried out to the Lord, & they said to Moses, "Why did you bring us out here to die in the wilderness? Weren't there enough graves for us in Egypt? What have you done to us? Why did you make us leave Egypt? Didn't we tell you this would happen while we were still in Egypt? We said, 'Leave us alone! Let us be slaves to the Egyptians. It's better to be a slave in Egypt than a corpse in the wilderness!'"

Do you hear what they say? "O Lord, look at them coming! You've got a clear shot at them now!" NO. "Why did you bring us out here to die in the wilderness? Weren't there enough graves in Egypt? Slavery there is better than dead here!" Under pressure... forward by zig-zags & they attribute malice aforethought to Yahweh. *You brought us here to kill us.* God's enemies as well as God's people often mistake forward by zig-zags for being adrift, for being lost, for being trapped...as an excuse to give up... Faced with a battle or confronted with challenges, obstacles, difficulty, or danger...

When the price of freedom is too high...the cost of discipline too great ...giving up the known too scary...obedience too overwhelming...slavery is a familiar route & routine.

So let's set this up...they have the wilderness (including the Red Sea) in their face, their enemies at their backs, & fear within. I reckon you know the feeling. Maybe not someone really wanting to kill you...but some days it feels like that...**But** *Moses told the people, "Don't be afraid. Just stand (firm) still & watch the Lord rescue you today. The Egyptians you see today will never be seen again. The Lord himself will fight for you. Just stay calm. (hold your peace)"* Moses sees chooks off about to run off in every direction at once...so his commands are simple. Fear God & you have nothing else to fear. Trust God & no enemy can prevail. Hold your peace...don't lose your grip on the assurance of God's promise & purpose coming to pass in your lives...stand firm...hold your peace. **Then** *the Lord said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the people to get moving! Pick up your staff & raise your hand over the sea. Divide the water so the Israelites can walk through the middle of the sea on dry ground."* In this moment, forward by zig-zag becomes forward through the Sea.

Isaiah proclaims: *This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance & rest is your salvation, in quietness & trust is your strength..."* - **Is 30:15**

Likewise the psalmist: *Your road led through the sea, your pathway through the mighty waters — a pathway no one knew was there! You led your people along that road like a flock, with Moses & Aaron as their shepherds.* - **Ps 77:19-20** Fear God & you have nothing else to fear. Trust God & no enemy can prevail. Hold your peace...don't lose your grip on the assurance of God's promise & purpose coming to pass in your lives...stand firm...hold your peace. God's road sometimes zig-zags & sometimes goes straight into the sea.

What is assured in all the uncertainty & unknown of life...amid the threats & dangers fears & follies...is this: **We** live & move & have our very existence enveloped in the presence, protection & provision of the Father. **God** is always *WITH* us & forever *FOR* us & He will not leave you to wander alone. Watch...

**The** Lord went ahead of them. He goes ahead of you. **He** guided them during the day with a pillar of cloud, & he provided light at night with a pillar of fire. This allowed them to travel by day or by night. That same guiding presence is yours by the Holy Spirit & the Word of God. **The** Lord did not remove the pillar of cloud or pillar of fire from its place in front of the people. And he never will...**For** God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never abandon you." So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper, I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me?" The path God leads is a life in communion with him & worship of him. From him every blessing flows.

**TAKE IT HOME** - As you leave today...be specific as you share with your neighbour

With whom will you share your confident "walking in the promise" this week?

Let's pray with that in mind...

"Lord, do whatever you need to do *IN* us, so you can do whatever you want to do *THROUGH* us so that all whom we know in this city & beyond might be called into the embrace of your love, the fullness of your power & & the joy of your purpose...through Jesus Christ...Amen.