

15th February 2021

Dear Friends

As many of you know I love walking. My old walking group used to sing when we were walking, especially when it was raining to cheer us up. Some of our songs were very silly, some of them were rounds and some of them were classics. One of them was a song I learned from the Mennonites. It's called 'Come Walk with me' and its repetitive. It goes like this...

'Come walk with me for the journey is long,

Come walk with me for the journey is long

Come walk with me for the journey is long, the journey, the journey, the journey is long.

The journey, the journey, the journey is long

The journey, the journey, the journey is long

The journey, the journey, the journey is long, come walk with me for the journey is long.

It's a typical Mennonite song, in that the same elements are repeated in a different combination and it goes on and on in this way. You can sing it as many times as you want to and when you are on a long walk, especially when it's hard going, the repetition is strangely therapeutic.

We are living a long season and I don't know about you, but I am wondering how much longer will it go on for? Walking through this season is testing. It tests our resilience and it's not easy. We need good companions and we need strength. We also need a sense of direction because the new normal whenever it comes will be different from the old.

When I was walking Offa's Dyke there is a moment that I remember when we were faced with a decision about the route. We had been walking up a very steep hill and came to a stile over a wall with a lane on the other side. We could have gone left or we could have gone right. After some debate we went right and followed the lane down hill until we came to another path that we followed for about a mile and by then we knew we had gone wrong. Warily we retraced our steps and when we arrived back at the stile I decided to look and see if there was a sign. Sure enough on the other side of the wall there was a small arrow with the words 'Offa's Dyke long distance path' and it pointed left. None of us had seen it. None of us had looked. When I remember that I also remember the words of Jeremiah 6.16.

‘Stand at the crossroads and look. Ask for the ancient paths. Ask where the good way is and walk in it and you will find rest for your souls.’

A trusted path can be good and helpful but we should never take it for granted. A trusted path can also become a groove we can't escape. We need to be asking, is this the way?

In Isaiah 30. 21, there is a promise which says, ‘Whenever you turn to the right or the left your ears will hear a voice from behind you saying, “This is the way, walk in it.”’

So, following Jesus requires us to seek the way, asking for the ancient path of Christian obedience while seeking to actively listen for the Spirit of God, guiding and nudging us in the direction we should go. This requires patience and as we enter Lent on Wednesday it's a good opportunity to practise this spiritual discipline; beginning each day with a prayer that we will grow in our willingness to listen for God's voice, discern his path and find the wisdom we need in the choices we make.

Eugene Peterson described Christian discipleship as ‘the long walk of obedience in the same direction.’

No one else can walk the path for us but finding good companions to share the walk with is a great thing. When Jesus surprised the disciples on Emmaus road they were walking together. As I think of the people who formed my walking group over many years, I am grateful to all of them because each of them contributed something to the whole, a gift for song, cheerfulness, thoughtfulness, playfulness, resilience, map reading skills, common sense and so much more. God gifts us each other for a reason.

As we walk the road to Jerusalem with Jesus through the long days of Lent that lead us to Easter may we find grace for the long walk of obedience in the same direction. No one else can walk the path for us but finding good companions to share the walk with is a great thing. When Jesus surprised the disciples on Emmaus road they were walking together.

When we are weary, may we be renewed in confidence and hope as our strength is restored.

‘Do you not know?’

Haven't you heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary and his understanding is beyond human grasp.

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

Even youths grow tired and weary and young men stumble and fall,

but those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength

They will rise on wings like eagles.

They will run and not grow weary.

They will walk and not be faint.'

Isaiah 40 vs 31

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We have just endured some very cold weather but I hope it will begin to improve. I can't visit people at the moment but if you would like to go for a walk, please let me know and I will be glad to join you.

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Your friend and pastor Mark