

You Are on the Right Track

Many years ago, when I was young and probably quite foolish, Glenn and I went on vacation in Nova Scotia. That was not the foolish part as Nova Scotia is a wonderful place to visit with beautiful sites, a fascinating history and lovely people. No, the more foolish part was our multi-day hike into the interior of the Cape Breton highlands. This was in the days before the internet. Guidebooks and printed maps were our only guides. Cell phones were the dreams of science fiction. One afternoon, we met a mother moose and her calf – we did not stick around for introductions. Later that day, I was chased by wasps – OK, it was probably only 2 or 3 but I was terrified, doing pirouettes as I tried to dodge them wearing a full backpack and hiking boots on a path uphill among the roots of the trees. Definitely foolish.

The trail was not well marked, and the question between the encounters with the local wildlife was, were we on the right track? We did make it back to our car, on schedule, without injury, and without the aid of any rescue service. We did not get lost. We were not too far off track.

You do not have to be vacationing in Cape Breton to wonder if you are on the right track. Drive along an unfamiliar road in heavy fog, or if you have been driving recently trying to find your way in the blowing snow when you cannot see the road signs or the landmarks. The question can nag at us whether we are on the right road? Did we miss our turn? It is easy to become fearful.

Are we going the right way? Are we on track? Are we on a good path or road? These can be familiar questions.

These are the same questions that the apostles are asking themselves. Only six days ago Jesus had told his followers that he was going to “undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” (v16:21)

The apostles are afraid. How could Jesus be the leader to free them from the tyranny of the Romans if he is to be killed? I rather doubt that they heard the phrases at the end that Jesus would be raised on the third day. Besides that, in their minds, that was too weird to be true. Nobody comes back from the dead after three days.

Now, we hear that Jesus has taken three of the apostles, Peter, James and John up a high mountain. Mountains, in the Jewish tradition, are closer to God and the places are often sacred. It was up a mountain, shrouded in cloud, that Moses meets with God and receives the Ten Commandments.

It is up a mountain that Peter, James and John have their eyes opened and they see a new reality. Before their eyes, Jesus is transfigured, changed. His clothes become dazzling white, his face shines and then Moses and Elijah are standing beside him, talking to him.

Then a voice comes from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”

Listen to him! He knows the way. He can guide you on the right path.

Peter, James and John had not been around to hear when God made a similar statement and identified Jesus as his son at his baptism in the River Jordan.

The visit by Moses and Elijah, the voice from heaven have re-written their understanding of who Jesus is. The new reality they are learning is that the way of Jesus is God's way in the world. The one that they had been following, Jesus, had the power to transform them into agents of God's love and justice and to heal a broken world. It was not what they expected. It was a reality of peace, of loving one's neighbour, of working with rather than fighting against.

Are we going the right way? Are we on track? Are we on a good path or road? Life can feel pretty precarious at times. We do not know what is going to happen tomorrow. It may be a storm, a frightening person, or a scary medical diagnosis. Fear can dominate our lives. Fear can stop us in our tracks and envelop us. We want to know that God is present with us in this chaos. We want to know that we are on the right track.

When we make space for the Holy Spirit, God will be there; that is God's promise.

For some people this may happen on a mountain top, like the disciples, with a blinding light.

For more people it will happen in more ordinary moments.

Some people have natural locations that they can feel the presence of God.

It might be a mountain top or another place with a beautiful vista.

It might be on the banks of a river or stream, with the gurgling of the water flowing by.

For some it is a meadow of flowers in the spring or the brilliant display of fall leaves.

Some are places have been shared for generations and others are fleeting.

In the Celtic tradition these are known as thin places, specific locations where the veil between the physical world and the spiritual world is exceptionally thin, allowing for a closer, more immediate experiences of the divine. Natural spots or historic churches have long provided a sense of peace, transformation and reconnection with a deeper reality.

The presence or appearance of God may also be found in ritual, meditation or other spiritual practices.

God may appear to us in a classroom, working in a soup kitchen, in an office or walking along the street.

So, when life feels precarious and uncertain, in those times of fear and anxiety, we can make space for the Holy Spirit, allow God to be present in the muck and mess of our everyday lives, and recall God's promise that nothing can separate us from God's steadfast love. Nothing!

God shines a light on our path, and we are on the right track.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

Readings: Matthew 17:1-9