

Over the last few weeks we have been thinking about being on a journey with God. We've seen how God called Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; how he used the unexpected event of a bush that was on fire but didn't burn to attract Moses; we know that Moses rescued the people because he trusted God – as a result the Egyptians were plundered when the Israelites left and the Egyptian army was destroyed in the sea.

The Israelites were quick to complain. Every now and again they would talk about how much better everything was when they were in Egypt – despite the fact that they had been slaves there and their lives were not good:

*Exodus 2:23 During that long period, the king of **Egypt** died. The Israelites groaned **in** their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God.*

*Exodus 3:8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the **Egyptians** and to bring them up out of that land **into** a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.*

*Exodus 3:17 And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery **in Egypt** into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey.'*

*Exodus 14:11 They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves **in Egypt** that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of **Egypt**?"*

*Exodus 14:31 And when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the **Egyptians**, the people feared the Lord and put their trust **in** him and **in** Moses his servant.*

*Exodus 32:4 He took what they handed him and made it **into** an idol cast **in** the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of **Egypt**."*

*Numbers 11:18 "Tell the people: 'Consecrate yourselves **in** preparation for tomorrow, when you will eat meat. The Lord heard you when you wailed, "If only we had meat to eat! We were better off **in Egypt**!" Now the Lord will give you meat, and you will eat it.*

Today our story finds them at the Promised Land. Deuteronomy 1:21-23 ²¹ *See, the Lord your God has given you the land. Go up and take possession of it as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, told you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.*”

²² *Then all of you came to me and said, “Let us send men ahead to spy out the land for us and bring back a report about the route we are to take and the towns we will come to.”*

²³ *The idea seemed good to me; so I selected twelve of you, one man from each tribe.*

It seems that Moses changed his mind because the people wanted to check out where they were going. On the face of it, it seems quite reasonable to check your route and the potential hazards you might face.

The problem is that they had already been told that God was giving them the land. There was no need to do what they were asking to do. My suspicion is that God saw this as an act of unfaithfulness and decided that they were not ready to inherit the land yet, and so he let them do it their way. The spies appear to have travelled hundreds of miles through the land before coming back with their report.

The first main city they came to was Hebron, the burial place of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Instead of seeing it as a reminder of the great promises of God to them and their forefathers, they saw only three huge men, the descendants of Anak. The Anakites were known for being very large – hence some translations called them giants. It was many years before Caleb returned and drove them out of the city (Joshua 15:13-14).

When the spies came back they were able to report that Canaan did indeed flow with milk and honey – just as God had promised Abraham in Exodus 3:8 *So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.* Even though God had promised them a fertile and spacious land to live in, all they saw were the problems – the large and intimidating people and the fortified cities of the people already there. But these are the people God has already told them they will defeat. Here’s my first point:
Unbelief sees obstacles where faith sees opportunities.

We read that when the people saw what God had done they had believed in him. This wasn't a previous generation – I can understand that they might have been suspicious of the reality of the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob or even Joseph because they had happened so long before. They had been 430 years in Egypt – that was outside their experience. Crossing the sea was their experience, seeing Egypt defeated was their experience, defeating the Amalekites was their experience – yet when it came to the bit they simply did not believe that God would give them victory. Perhaps it was even more basic than that – they did not believe in God.

I wonder if we're not the same. We read the bible stories but we can be critical and unbelieving because we have not had the experiences they talk about. Hundreds of people came to faith in the Lewis revivals but some folk question if it wasn't some sort of mass hysteria that gripped people. I didn't experience it but I believe that God was at work in a very powerful way. My experience is that I have grown and fallen; been close to God and far from God. Very few really dramatic things have happened, yet through it all God has been with me and each step of faith has encouraged another. I think that's the important point – we need to be taking steps of faith before we take giant leaps of faith. As we learn to trust God in small things the big things become smaller. If your relationship with God hasn't changed in the last year you need to ask why? Friends to catch up with - John

Don't put difficulties between you and God – put God between you and the difficulties.

Are you facing a situation which requires you to trust God, something that seems impossible but you believe God is asking you to step out in faith? If God has called you he will make a way for you.

As we continue on the Path of Renewal process we're going to have to trust God. It is easy to see the obstacles and the difficulties but what we need is to ask God for faith to see the opportunities. We know that God is at work – the foodbank; Alpha; lives changed; Sutherland House

We need more Calebs – people who say, “we certainly can”.

It gets worse for the Israelites because the ten spies begin to lie about the problems and effectively they are calling God a liar. Numbers 13:31 *We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are.* But they're not stronger than God! They began to exaggerate the difficulties – the Anakites grew into the Nephilim, the

legendary giants of pre-flood days; and the Israelites by comparison shrank to the size of grasshoppers – and with it the faith of the people disappeared.

Numbers 14:1-12 *That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. ² All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, “If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! ³ Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” ⁴ And they said to each other, “We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”*

⁵ Then Moses and Aaron fell facedown in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there. ⁶ Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes ⁷ and said to the entire Israelite assembly, “The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. ⁸ If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. ⁹ Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them.”

¹⁰ But the whole assembly talked about stoning them. Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the Israelites. ¹¹ The LORD said to Moses, “How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them? ¹² I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they.”

It didn’t take God forty years to get them to the Promised Land out of Egypt, it took forty years to get Egypt out of them. We have to be so careful not to spend our time looking back to what we perceive as the ‘glory days’ of the church – it’s not that we shouldn’t look back and learn lessons from the past, but we need to be very careful that holding on to the past doesn’t prevent us getting to the place God wants us to be now.

As we go together into the future we are going to be forming a team of people and I’m going to talk a bit more about that next week but I want you to think about where you would have found yourself – with the ten who only saw the problems, or with the two who saw the opportunities? The two weren’t being unrealistic – they knew it would be difficult and that there were battles to be fought but they also knew that with God on their side victory was assured.

Jesus was acutely aware of the anguish he would face at Calvary and he asked his father if there was any other way sin could be dealt with, but he was willing to do what the Father said, to put that before the pain and suffering. He trusted the promise and the will of the Father – and so must we.

Communion: The Invitation

This table belongs to Jesus; we come at his instruction, and it is him that we remember as we come. It is not wealth, accomplishment, knowledge or any human activity that allow us to come and share this meal, it is faith. This meal is open to anyone who loves Jesus. If you are not sure about your relationship with him, simply pass the bread and wine on when they come to you, but think about what they represent as you do that; Christ's sacrifice for you.

We are here to look back, here to look forward.

We are here to remember one who died, here to greet one who lives.

We are here to share bread and wine, here to share fellowship together.

We are here in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who invites us, as he invited his first disciples, to take supper with him.

He shared the bread and wine, with the one who would betray him,
the one who would deny him,
and those who would abandon him in his hour of need.

He shared bread and wine,
with those who couldn't stay awake with him,
even for an hour,
for those who, for all their enthusiasm couldn't understand,
those who were puzzled and confused, full of doubt and fear.

He invites us to share bread and wine,
you and I, who are weak and sinful,
who daily fail him,
who prefer our way to his,
who have barely begun to understand the true meaning of discipleship.
Though your faith is frail,
and your faults are many,
though you have many questions,
and much to learn,
come, now and share bread and wine, come and find life for your soul.