

Journeying—in God’s Ways
The Reverend Debbie Cook, Grace Church in Haddonfield
Easter Vigil: Exodus 14:10-31, Isaiah 55:1-11, Matthew 28:1-10
March 22, 2008

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.”

I am sure that anyone who has wrestled with our God will attest to that. God works in God’s time, for God’s purposes. We may feel that going from point A to point B should be simple and direct, but God? God likes journeys. And journeys take time, which is what you need when you are building relationship.

The newly-freed Israelites certainly did not understand God’s ways when they found themselves at the sea with the Egyptians closing in. Where was the God who had sent plagues upon Egypt, until Pharaoh finally relented and let them go? Did God just bring them out to drop them here? Ah, but the journey was just beginning, and the relationship was shaky, and so the Israelites quickly second guessed the ways of the Lord. Who could have foreseen that dry passage could appear amidst the waters? Not these fearful Israelites, and certainly not the surprised Egyptians. But the waters did part, and the Israelites passed through them, journeying from their old life in captivity to the new life in freedom. It may have been a physically short span of their long journey to the promised land, but it was the most important one, for it laid a foundational stone of trust.

It was many generations later that the Israelites found themselves journeying once more—for they found themselves in exile in Babylon. They lamented the loss of their land; they had squandered God’s blessings and taken God’s good favor and love for granted. But God’s ways are that of mercy and pardon; they are not the ways of bitterness or unrelenting anger that can

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harden into hatred. And so God calls the Israelites to journey home—home to a life in relationship with God. Home to a new life, full of evidence of the glory of God. A revived, restored people—not to exist just to promote themselves, but a people that exist as witnesses to the salvation of God.

But the story of salvation, the story of new life in God, does not end there. Fast forward a few hundred more years, and again God’s people find themselves under foreign rule, oppressed and longing to be set free. They prayed for, they looked for a Savior—a new David, rising up to rout the occupying Roman forces and reclaim their sovereignty. Just as God has called Moses, and David, and made it possible for the Israelites to return from Babylon, so they anticipated that God would act as it had been done in the past. But God’s ways are not our ways, and the Messiah arrived not in power and glory, but in a manger. He grew up a carpenter’s son in a backwater village, not in a palace or temple leaders’ home. He gathered to himself not the elite and powerful and influential, but fishermen and tax collectors and sinners. And he died not in glory on a battlefield or on a mountain top; instead he died a suffering death upon the cross, abandoned by his followers, rejected by the ones he had come to save.

And yet it was this death, the death of the sinless Son of God, that opened the way to new life, eternal life with God. Through Christ’s sacrifice, the power of sin, that which separates us from God, was broken, once for all. Even the bonds of death cannot hold the source of life and love and light—and so Christ was raised to a new life, a resurrection life—journeying through death so that we may have a new, restored relationship with God.

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In baptism, we say ‘yes’ to that new relationship with God, following Christ as Lord and Savior. We pass through the water, like the Israelites of old, leaving behind our old life for a new one in Christ. We die to our old selves, and rise through Christ to new life—a life as a child of God, as a member of the body of Christ. We are made free, restored, forgiven. Most of all, we commit to the journey, walking with our Lord, learning about God’s ways, in God’s time.

So come, let us be on our way. God’s waiting.

Amen.