

Texts: Exodus 13 and 14

January 18, 2009 FCMF #1

Themes: Vision and Faith are for those on the Move

Holy Journeys and Sacred Paths

“What are you doing? Have you led us out here into the wilderness only to leave us, leave us to die? I was afraid this would happen! Didn’t I tell you that it would end up this way? Maybe we should just give it up, quit and go back!” The rumblings of God’s chosen as they see Pharaoh’s army approaching (rumblings we too may have considered when the times get tough). In spite of the great cloud of God leading them in the day and a pillar of fire during the night, God’s people are having second thoughts. The vision that was given to them while on Holy Ground, that powerful insight which had transforming power while in that sacred space, is now being tested. How quickly things change! Clouds are certainly welcome when one is traveling through a desert since they can provide some relief from a blazing sun. Fire lighting up the night is crucial not only for seeing the way but for scaring off all that goes “bump” in the night. And yet even these seem insufficient when the journey becomes extremely difficult. I know this because I’ve been there, been there more times than I care to think.

“Where are you leading me God?!” “Maybe we should turn back?” “Why, why have you deserted me, left me just when I need you the most!?”

Last Sunday I talked about vision, faith and hope and how these can substantially change our perception of reality. I suggested it might work like this: we encounter with the Divine in a sacred space which leads to a radical change, a change that can enable faith. Faith then imparts a new perspective, allowing us to have hope in the unseen actions of God. This glimpse of God’s reality then can implant within us a new vision of new possibilities. And as we live in this faith, as we act upon our new vision and in the power of the Holy Spirit, the pressing realities surrounding us will change. And as we change and as realities change, we also realize that some of the most important things do not change- like God, and God’s love! We become compulsive, compelled, not by who we are or by what we need to change but we are compelled by the power that has changed us! Like a moth drawn to a flame or astronomers following a star, we find ourselves mesmerized, searching and on the move.

As we begin to move it is likely that we will not know just exactly where we will end up. We are only certain really about one thing and that is we must follow the vision and start the journey. The journey itself may become so compelling that at times we are convinced that to travel it, is actu-

ally life itself! We begin to uncover clues and discover bits of information that serve as confirmation that we are on a good path. We also begin to meet others traveling the same path and we begin to share our experiences of the road and hopes for what we might encounter further on down the line. We also help each other to keep going, fixing flat tires, sharing fuel and what ever it takes to “keep that trucking convoy rollin’ through the night!” And we encounter barriers to scale and boundaries to cross, but the vision and the journey has left us forever changed and it is too late, we cannot go back only go forward.

I guess I’ve really gotten into a groove these past two weeks! All this talk of Holy things and Sacred events is a strange thing for a Mennonite! I wonder if some of my ancestors are turning over in their graves? After all, one of the key disagreements the early Anabaptists had with both Catholics and most other reformers was that no thing or person can be Holy. For the Anabaptist there were no such things as “Holy days” or “Holy objects” and no “Holy Saints” let alone “Holy Fathers” in Rome! We still sing the song, “Holy, holy, holy! Lord God almighty” Only God is Holy and many of our foreparents enunciated this as they were lead to prison and death! The words of Jesus are for each one of us to follow every day of our lives. Baptism, Communion and foot-washing, are very important but they are sym-

bols that point to a deeper reality of one's faith in God and also to one's commitment to the community of believers.

So, my brothers and sisters where are we going? Are we on the move- on a "Sacred Journey" together? And have you also felt, at times, as if God has lead us out into a wilderness only to abandon us, scorched and vulner- able!? Are we afraid, wanting to know more of the details before we begin? This reminds me of a story I heard M. Scott Peck's tell of a certain Jewish Rabbi and his encounter one day with the Russian sheriff of his village...

Having lots of information of what lies ahead is can be comforting. But as we move forward it is also helpful to know where we have been. And where have we come from here at FCMF? What do we know that is certain? Well we know that for more than 30 years Mennonites have been gathering for worship, support and to watch (on and off) Broncos football here in FC, CO. Hundreds of folks have come through this place and many have found it an oasis of faith in the No Co wilderness. We who are here today are committed to continued to grow in both numbers and in ways that will nur- turing our spirits and our community. And as was pointed out last week by one of our visitors, we continue to make an impact in our community that is far out of proportion to our numbers. I am also confident therefore that

our people resources and our financial resources will continue to grow and that our impact on the world around us will also continue.

But as important as it is to take stock of where we have been it is also critical to know who you are traveling with. We know that there is safety in numbers and it sure is nice to know there will be help when the road gets tough! When we loose our way it is good to know that others will gently help get us back onto the right track. And when it seems impossible and we want to give up its comforting to know that others will stop and stay with us, as long as it takes, till we are ready to press on. So FCMF where are we going? Do we want to keep going or are we ready to turn back?

As I mentioned last week there are many places to find vision to dream Holy dreams! I hold a couple in my hand; one is a Bible, another is a bulletin that has our vision statement on the cover and a copy of the results from last October's "Gift discernment survey." Question 3 asked folks to write down some of their dreams for FCMF, and here's what you said (some have been edited for length but none were left out):

Find a voice for engaging/inviting community in an authentic way.

Cut back pastor's time. Share preaching load. Barter with the Apostolics (sic) for custodial service. Improve the building (write a master plan).

More small groups with caring community life

... have enough members to pay for a full-time pastor.

As a church we grow by keeping who we are alive. A lunch time special involving old town.

I have a dream of 80-100 worshipers/week. I also have a dream about a worship band that plays monthly (contemporary music)

More progressive, social justice oriented folks to join us... more resources to do our work, to be a beacon for social justice in the community.

Gentle, healthy growth of membership.

Internally, I would like to work on reconciliation, building trust and healing hurts. Externally, I want to let people know about our message and our community – the world needs Mennonites!

To continue a ministry of peace and justice. To grow our numbers...

More acceptance of our differences, no email communication that can hurt or divide (more direct face to face communication), less “me” and more “we”. Growing in number so that we do not burn out.

Double the size of regular attenders. Double number of people doing tasks that need doing. More Financial support of outside-the-church ministry.

Outreach to more people, Multiply our community of FCMF.

Identify one primary community-based missions/focus – like CORE, we also need several (maybe 5-10) new members.

This is attractive, exciting, compelling and Holy! These dreams I believe are Holy visions, Holy visions given to us by our Divine companion who is traveling with us! And though we may only glimpse them from afar right now, I believe we are headed in the right direction. I know its a long journey but I am also excited to get going! So count me in! And as Neil Diamond once sang, “Lets pack up the babies and grab the old ladies and

everyone go!” Yah, the financial uncertainties and the hard choices that needed to be made to our budget sure felt like a punch in the gut. The past month has been a difficult time for us and it may have even stop our progress for a bit. And even if those difficulties did slow our tempo were still moving and, I am convinced, gaining speed.

Has God led us, the FCMF, this past 30 plus years to now suddenly abandon us? Do any of us want to go back, back 30, 10 or even one year? Now I ain't sayin there aren't some good things to embrace from our past but we must embrace the good as we move forward. Let us take stock, let us never take for granted what God has done for us and in us. But let us also commit ourselves to the journey in the confidence, confidence that God is leading the way. And when difficulties comes, when situations kick us in the gut or stop us in our tracks, let us then stand, standing still between the sea and the whirlwind of God's presence and protection. Standing firm in a place of quiet confidence, where God will protect us and where we can renew our faith and rekindle hope in the vision God has given us. Standing still in the difficult and hard places, in the frightening and anxious spaces and knowing for certain that our God cares of us! Knowing for certain that our God will not leave us, our will God not forsake us and our God will fight for us! God has not lead us into a barren place so that we will perish. God

has lead us here and God desires to keep us going! Jehovah will keep us
alive and it will be Jehovah who will keep us on the move!