

# The Journey

January 28, 2024

Welcome to the Beamsville Church of Christ online ministry. This week's message is titled "The Journey." The scripture reading is 1 Peter 1, 13-21. Thank you to the Great Lakes Christian High School Chorus for leading us in worship. Thank you to Josh for leading them and sharing thoughts at the communion table. And thank you to Don for bringing us the message. Happy birthday this week to Pam.

## Welcome, Announcements, Prayer

Good morning, everyone, I'm happy to see you here this morning. Got a few announcements that we'd like to start with. Dianne is updating the church directory, so please speak to her to update your information, or if you want to be added, or I guess if you want to be removed. But don't do that, because don't do that. Barbara is planning a games night. The date is to be determined on that, but please do speak to her. If you are interested in that, it'll be a Friday or Saturday evening. And if you have a card table, let her know so we can get together and spend some time fellowshiping that way together.

As you may be able to guess, the chorus will be leading us in worship today, and I'm going to invite them up in just a minute after we pray.

As we mentioned last week, Mark MacDonnell has passed away, and there will be a celebration of his life on Zoom. There is a link in the email bulletin for that, and that'll be in the next, you can check that out or you can ask me if you don't have that. We know that Paul is scheduled for another surgery this week, or at least he is scheduled for it. I don't know if it's actually going to happen, but he is scheduled for it to address his kidney stones. So please keep him in your prayers this week. And Marie's grandson is also undergoing some procedures related to the trouble he has swallowing. He is on the mend, he is doing better, but he still has some quite painful surgery procedures ahead of him, so that is something to keep in mind as well. Let's go to God in prayer right now.

Lord it is good to be in your presence, to be united with your people. Thank you for those who braved the weather this morning, for everyone gathered here, for everyone gathered all around the world. We ask for your presence to be with us, that we would feel that you are here. We know that you are here God, but we ask that we would feel it as well. Thank you for this time. Thank you for these people, and it is in your son's name we pray. Amen.

I would like to invite the chorus forward.

## Song

### Go Down Moses

Oh when Israel was in Egypt land,  
Let my people go  
Oppressed so hard, they could not stand,  
Let my people go

Go down Moses, Way down in Egypt land  
Tell old Pharaoh, To let my people go

Thus spoke the Lord, bold Moses said  
(audience applauding) -

Let my people go  
If not I'll smite, your firstborn dead  
Let my people go

No more shall they in bondage toil  
Let my people go  
Let them come out of Egypt's spoil  
Let my people go

## Communion

Let's pray together, Lord, we worship you because these truths are true. They are true yesterday, today, and forever. You are, you were, and you will always be holy, exalted over all things. And as we gather in your presence this morning, it is

not lost on us how awesome it is that we can stand before you, the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords, the one who created all things. Lord, now as we move into a time of communion, as we remember how you made a way for us to be in your presence through Jesus Christ alone, would you once again fill our hearts with gratitude and thanksgiving and worship for all that you are and all that you have done. Jesus, this morning is all about you. Our worship is all for you. It's in your name we pray, amen.

You can be seated. And we're gonna distribute some communion cups among our chorus members. They're gonna stay up here, and we're gonna sing a song together in a minute, just to prepare our hearts for communion.

You know, as we sing songs like this, they give us a little bit of a taste of heaven. And at the same time as I sing songs like this, I think, wow, Lord, who are we that we can stand in your presence? Who are we, God, that we can even sing to you and you delight to hear us sing? Who are we that we can even come before you and you delight to hear us? As I think about that, that's what really moves us into this time of communion. As we worship and we're filled with joy in God's presence, we also must remember the reason why we can be filled with joy in his presence, and that is through Jesus alone. Because on our own, we were far from God. Based on our own sinful habits and decisions, we had separated ourselves from a holy God, a God who is holy forever, because the reality is that sinful people cannot be in the presence of this God who is holy forever.

And yet, we have these amazing truths from Scripture, and I'd like to read to you from Romans chapter five, verses six to 11, to prepare our hearts for communion. It says this,

*"For while we were still weak, "at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. "For one will scarcely die for a righteous person. "Though perhaps for a good person, "one would dare even to die. "But God shows his love for us, "in that while we were still sinners, "Christ died for us. "Since therefore we have been justified by his blood, "much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. "For if while we were enemies, "we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, "much more, now that we are reconciled, "shall we be saved by his life. "More than that, we also rejoice in God "through our Lord Jesus Christ, "through whom we now have received reconciliation."*

ROMANS 5:6-11 (ESV)

That word reconciliation is so powerful here because if we truly understand the state of our souls apart from God, we understand that our relationship with God was broken. There was a great chasm between us and this holy God, the creator of the universe, and yet through Jesus Christ, that chasm was bridged. Through Jesus Christ, the divide that was between us and God was brought together, and we have been reconciled by Jesus to God. Isn't that amazing?

Every time we stop and pause and remember these truths, every time we stop and take the bread and drink the cup, would the Lord make those truths just bring awe and gratitude into our hearts? What kind of God would step down off of his throne for a sinful people like us, this God, through Jesus Christ who loves you and who loves me? And so we're gonna sing a few verses of a song together called "Yet Not I, But Through Christ in Me." And this song is a reminder that there is nothing in this that we accomplished. There is nothing in our salvation that we worked hard enough or did enough good to earn or achieve, but it was all through Jesus, all through grace, and we can come before his throne and gratefully receive it this morning. So this isn't a song that we've actually been singing in chorus this year, but I understand that you know the song. So we're gonna sing it together. They're gonna stay up and help us. I'd like to invite you just as we begin to stand and we'll sing it together. And then once we get to the end of the third verse, we'll sit down and we'll take the bread and the cup together. So let's stand and use this song to prepare our hearts. Let's be seated together and let's pray as we receive the bread which represents the body of Christ and the grape juice which represents his blood.

Lord, we thank you this morning that you looked upon us with great love and compassion and mercy. And you sent Jesus to this earth that his body was broken on the cross as our sins were placed upon him and as he absorbed the totality of your wrath against sin on the cross. And we thank you for his blood that was shed, that was poured out for us so that our sins could be washed away so that we could stand before you spotless and clean through Jesus. We thank you for these



*down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake through him you believe in God who raised him from the dead and glorified him. And so your faith and hope are in God.*

1 PETER 1:13-21 (NIV)

It's interesting that this passage begins with this idea of our minds being alert and fully sober. So my question to you is, how many actions in any given day are conscious and intentional? I mean in any regular day, much less than we would probably consider.

So several years ago, not long before my oldest son Micah was going to get his driver's license, he was watching me closely. He noticed that each time I moved the gear shift, and there's only a few people in the room, I mean they hardly even sell cars that are standard anymore, but he was watching me move the gear shift. And while he was watching me, he suddenly noticed that every time I moved the gear shift with my hand, I was doing something with my foot. And he was flabbergasted. He thought that all you had to do was move that little stick around and made the car go. And so he asked, what are you doing with your foot? And I explained to him how a clutch works and how you have to time it just right so you don't stall the car and move from one gear into another, and after I'd explained it all, he said to me, it seemed really difficult. But I assured him, at least at this point in my life, it was not difficult at all. And the reason is, is because I had been doing it for so many years. It was difficult to learn. Ask my wife, she taught me, which was humbling in itself. It was difficult to learn how to drive a standard car, but once you knew, and after you had done it a hundred times, a thousand times, many thousand times, you just don't think about it anymore. You just do it. And I wonder sometimes, as Christians, if this is how we walk through life.

Now, our days are filled with routine, and that's comfortable. And I want to be clear here, most of our daily tasks, if we had to think about every single decision we made every day, we would go insane. It's good that there are many decisions we don't have to consciously think about. But for Christians, we have to be careful not to shift our faith into autopilot. And a lot of what we do here together is very similar, right? It's structured. Worship can become rote. We can come, but our brains can check out. It's hard to be conscious and fully sober. Do we go through the actions, but not get below the surface? I know for me, one of my traps is, I pray a lot. I really do. I can say that with conviction, but I don't know how many times I actually pray because I have something I meaningfully want to pray about or because that's just what I do. If the direction that we want to go in, in life, physically or spiritually, never turns, never presents obstacles, autopilot would be great. But who in your life journey has ever traveled a perfectly straight, uninterrupted line? I can answer that for you. This is one thing I can answer for you, none of us. That's the world we live in. There are obstacles, turns, sharp turns, dangerous turns. And on this one, sorry, if the order is upset, we suddenly have to jump into action. We suddenly realize where we actually are. We have to become conscious or we risk losing control and direction. And this is exactly where the recipients of Peter's letter find themselves.

See, they were people just like us. They have heard the gospel. They've believed the gospel. They are followers of Christ. But suddenly something is happening and this faith into which they have fervently entered seems to be cooling or at least challenged. It is sorely tried. There is the pull of pagan tradition, of competing philosophies, and now perhaps most significantly for the original audience, persecution and trial specifically because of what they believe. And because of all of this, their faith is shaken. Their doubts are growing. And they are being challenged by Peter to be conscious, to be sober, and to take control or to be led astray. So let's continue for a moment with this idea of a journey. I really appreciate the song that the chorus sings for us, this idea that we are on a journey and the journey is long and the journey is difficult. In verse 17 of this passage, we are reminded that we are strangers or foreigners in the world because this is not our final home. It's not our final destination. We are, as they say, just passing through. And in some translations, instead of being called strangers or foreigners, the word that is used here is sojourners. And you see in that sojourner the same root for journey. We are on a journey. And it reminds us that this life in this world is just some place that we're passing through.

Sometimes the journey brings joy, praise God. And sometimes the journey brings grief, and that's difficult. And often though, our journey, especially when we kind of shift into survival mode sometimes, and I know all of us have been there if we're not right now, we just see more and more of the same. And we just try to keep moving without conscious thought. But sometimes the journey gets difficult. Sometimes we're confronted with choice, especially the farther along on the journey that we have traveled, and we are tired, and we are hungry, and we feel burdened. We are sorely tempted to turn aside, to quit. We've forgotten the excitement and the energy of the start, and we have lost sight of the hope that draws us to the end.

In late July of 2017, I had an opportunity to attend a Christian Leaders Conference at Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas. So when I was there, I tacked on a couple of days at the end of my visit so that I could go over to the only national park in Arkansas, Hot Springs National Park. I have a little bit of an obsession with national parks. And I wanted to hike there. So not knowing when or if I was ever gonna be back, I was gonna do this no matter what. And so I headed down there and I picked a 26 kilometer trail that climbed and descended three low mountains that were wrapped around the town of Hot Springs, kind of like a croissant. There was one way in and one way out, and everything was in the middle, and these mountains circled it. And I thought, this is gonna be wonderful. And I don't know if any of you have ever hiked anywhere or even been in Arkansas in the middle of the summer. I'm gonna tell you one thing. If you're thinking about hiking in the middle of the summer, don't pick Arkansas. I was maybe half an hour into my hike when I saw my last person for like six hours after that. And when I stepped out of my hotel, I mean, I was instantly sweating. It was hot, it was humid. And actually, when I came back later, the heat for us Canadians hovered between 36 and 40 degrees Celsius and the humidity was 95%. But here's the thing, even when I got into it, I thought to myself, I don't know if I'm ever coming back. I have the right gear. I had four liters of water. I had great enthusiasm and this was gonna be awesome.

Well, just over two hours in, I discovered how unreliable my maps and my phone GPS were. There was a really unique rock formation I wanted to see, but I missed the fork. I realized I was well past where I should have turned in order to see it. Well, that's fine. I was disappointed. I wasn't going back. I had too far to go. But a couple more hours, and I gotta tell you, I was depleted. The sun was unrelenting. I sweated out much more than I could replenish. And my water ran out. And I was sitting down at the side of the trail, very scant cover in this particular place. And I knew that up ahead was a second, much more important fork. And I became concerned. What if I missed the second fork? The first fork, I just missed seeing something. The second fork, if I made the wrong choice, it would lead me further into the wilderness, out into the middle of nowhere and away from the town. And I could be in some serious trouble because I'd run out of water. So I sat there, thirsty, worried, and I considered my options. I could turn back.

Now, the advantage of this was it would take me four hours, probably to get back from where I started, but I knew the way. And I knew that there were amenities where I started. I could just sit there and wait and hope to be found by some other hikers, except I hadn't seen hikers in three hours. And it was unlikely, I think, in the middle of the trail I was going to see any that day. I could go off trail and head in what I thought was the direction of the town, which would be good if that actually was the right direction, but disastrous if not. I could just keep going forward. And now that I am fully aware and conscious, trust that I see the fork and make the right choice. If I was on the main path, I knew that water and amenities were actually closer going forward than if I went back.

Well, spiritually, especially in times of uncertainty, these are the choices we all face. Go back, stay still, go off on our own, or hold to the promise that although the way is difficult, that the fulfillment of our hope is awaiting us ahead. And we need to keep moving forward. First Peter 1.13, I don't know if you caught it, but it starts with the word therefore. So there's some important information that happened in the first part of the chapter, and we don't have time to go back and look at all of that, but I want to summarize a little. Prior to these verses, Peter is reminding us of the blessing that we've received in the Messiah who's been revealed to us, a Messiah who the prophets anticipated, but for us who has come, a Messiah who was chosen before the creation of the world, who is an expression of God's grace and was sacrificed on a cross, but who rose again and is right now on this journey that we are walking our living hope. Moreover, Peter acknowledges the trials that we face, but he assures us that though God does not promise freedom from suffering, he does give us the strength. And when we lean on him, the peace to endure. He is with us on the journey, Peter reminds

us. And he gives us a glimpse to remind us of where it is that we are going, to live in harmony with God and to receive a heritage that will never spoil, perish or fade.

So I think we'd be hard pressed to find anyone in the original audience or sitting in this room who would contest all that. I know all that. But where does it leave us? Because of these realities, which we have at least in word accepted, Peter is calling us into action. Peter is calling us into conscious intentionality. He asks us, are we conscious? Are we clear headed? And if yes, are we able to continue to place our hope in the grace to be brought to us when Christ returns? We have journeyed this far, haven't we? Peter reminds us, but the journey is not over and we may have miles yet to go. And he's saying, you're either moving forward, moving backward or not moving at all. And this is the inherent exhortation. That's that fancy churchy biblical word we use that means to emphatically urge. He is exhorting us to stay the course and keep pressing forward.

He says, "Praise God, you have received the word, you have believed, you've moved this far, but you've arrived at a crossroad and suddenly you're awake and I see it in your eyes, you're looking around you and you're asking, do I continue the way forward? It's threatening, it's uncertain. Maybe I should just rest for a while. Better still, maybe I should move backward away from the threat." And Peter continues. He gives us a warning. He says, "I understand that the past may seem safer. It's more comfortable, but a move backwards returns you to the evil desires and the ignorance we had." Do not be misled. Do not conform. In fact, what makes this difficult is there's probably many people on our journey that are going in the opposite direction. Maybe we should join them, but ask yourself this question, do you really want to go back to the place from which we've come? And I confess to you, I do not. So when the way forward is jarring, when it's difficult, when our autopilot's been disengaged and we are tired or worse, we are threatened, how do we keep moving forward?

Well, first we need to begin to consciously accept that we are indeed sojourners. This isn't it. We are in the world, but not of it. We are holy and separated. And in this part here, this is unlike some of the other places in the New Testament where we have these lists of things when there's a call to holiness. What he's trying to remind us of is that we are holy because God is holy and his spirit dwells in us. Think about that. Peter is reminding us of who we are in Christ. He reminds us too. God is gracious, but he's also just. He is a judge. He's watching us. He's always with us. And depending on where you are, that's either very comforting or quite intimidating. Either way, Peter wants to make us conscious of that reality.

You know, I've often believed, and I've said, that Satan's greatest tool for us, particularly in our culture, is distraction. When the world is in our face and it draws our attention, it blocks our view of God. He is relegated to the background, lost in the myriad concerns of our everyday living. He's somewhere up there ahead of me, but I've gotta deal with what's right in front of me now, except he is there with us. If we called to him and realized it, he's not somewhere up ahead. He wants to help you confront the crisis you are facing. We need to only seek him, call on him, and snap out of our auto control or survival mode and consciously be aware. So as we consider the remainder of the passage, we're reminded again of God's great grace, of his unfathomable love, of the cost that that love exacted for us. More reminders of how much God loves us and seeks to draw us from sin and the world to him for eternity. Being holy, being holy is what enables us to stay the course. But in order to be holy, what we have to do is answer a question. A question that I really think Peter is asking. It's the one that I hear when I read this passage. And the question is, for whom do you live?

Peter spends so much time trying to call us into a living consciousness of how much God loves us, of how much he's done for us, of what is promised in the end, that I think we might miss the real question he's asking. And his question is, for whom do you live? And I don't know how many of you have thought about that. Are you conscious at all that the way you live out each day is governed by this central idea? Whether you realize it or not, you do live for something or someone. And for whomever you live, it will determine the direction we go on the journey. And I know as believers, if someone asked me that question, I answer without thinking about it. I just say, I live for God. But then I cannot help but wonder when I look at the way I live out my every day, does it testify to that answer? Do I actually live for God? I know that's the right answer to give as a Christian, but does my life answer that question by the way in which it is lived out? And I know there is a temptation to live solely for people that are important to us, family, friends. Will we not do

anything for the people we care about? Of course we would. How could we argue against that idea? But if that happens to the exclusion of living for God, we have a problem. And I'll come back to that because it is my belief and Peter's that if you live for God, then the needs of the people you care about will be met. But a lot of times we live for other things and other people, not because we care about them, but because we seek approval, because we desire respect, because we want attention. And that can lead us into the thrall of peer pressure and worldly influence. But I think the greatest temptation for all of us and one that our culture actively promotes is to live for yourself. Focus only on what gratifies and satisfies your every momentary want. And this is why we fall into the traps of self-medication, of the desire to feel numb, because the rawness of our everyday difficult experiences are just too much to bear.

There was a time for a year when I worked at an auto plant, and there were some people there who loved it. But there were a whole bunch of people I worked with. You know what they live for? They lived for the weekend. They lived so that they could get drunk and forget the misery of the life that they had to get through ever. And perhaps our motivations are controlled by whatever it is we truly desire the most. Money, power, status. You see, when we live for ourselves, the sad reality is we simply live to get through life, but we're never actually really going anywhere. Peter knows that the intention of those to whom he writes is to live for God. I think if Peter were here, he would look at us and say, "I know your intention is to live for God, but maybe you're struggling to do it." I can identify with that. So Peter lays it out for us again. He highlights the word that has been received. He reminds us of all that God has done, of all that God is doing, of all he will do for us. Because if we are conscious of these truths on a more regular basis, then living for God does not be a burden, but a blessing. And the journey, despite its temptations, its trials and its difficulties, can continue. By living in the consciousness of how God loves us through Christ, we find in us a natural desire to live for him. And when we live for him, we will not be waylaid. We will not turn aside. We will not turn around.

When we live for God and not man, or for ourselves, or for the world, we press through the toils and the threats and the snares toward the goal. We have purposeful living in a world because we have purpose in a world that so desperately wants it. When Peter tells us to be holy, he's asking us to live for God. If we live for God, we will be holy, even as he is holy, and he will draw us nearer to him along the journey. An incredible byproduct of living for God is that we and those around us, and those around us will be blessed. Living for God enables and equips us to be better for our loved ones. Moreover, living for God means the more base and destructive aspects of living for ourselves, no longer holds us prisoner. Christ himself came as one who serves. God wants us to be blessed, and he wants those around us to be blessed by us, but not to control, not to consume, or drive us in unhealthy directions. You see, when God is our focus, we will not be in want. And those others for whom we are tempted to live will be served, but they will be served in wholesome, holy, and blessed ways.

So, I open with a little story about Micah. I'm gonna finish with one about Micah. Lucky guy. He gets to be here and hear this story a million times. Several years ago, he's 24 now, but when he was five or six, I was co-directing the teaming program with Brad. And at that time, every time I had to step up, no matter where it was, campfire, dining hall, to make an announcement to the camp, wherever Micah was, as soon as he heard my voice, he would run out into the middle, wrap himself around my leg, and look up at me intently until I acknowledged him. And then, he would stay there, clinging to my leg until all my announcements were done. And I have to be honest, it was really annoying. Now, of course, today, I look back on that, and I have reflected on it many times. And there's two things that I knew, that I realized. There was not a person in that camp that did not know two things. Everyone knew who Micah's father was. And everyone knew Micah loved his father. And I think of that innocent, wholehearted devotion, and I ask myself a question. When the world looks at me, do they know who my father is? And do they know how much I love him? And that's the core of what Peter is telling us to do consciously, to continue to journey with and to war God, to not just go through the motions, but to intentionally live for our father in a way that drives us forward in confidence to the hope that we have through Christ, to remember from where we have come, and to stay focused on where we are going.

So, my admonition to you, my exhortation, when people look at you, do they know who your heavenly father is? And do they see that you love him? Sometimes that testimony, that proclamation, will not be well received. It may even incite criticism or suffering, as it is to Peter's original audience. But if we are living for the father, we will be holy, we will be set

apart, we will persevere, we will endure, we will overcome, and we will finish this journey and receive our reward. And that really, I think, is Peter's admonition for all of us.

(soft piano music)

## Closing

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. And thank you all for being here today. Let's close on a word of prayer.

Lord, we have been blessed today so richly. Thank you for everyone gathered here. Thank you for the heart, for worship and praise that has been demonstrated this morning. Thank you for the connection that we have to you through the gift of your son. We can't thank you enough. We don't have the words. We don't know what to say. But listen to what our hearts say, God. Interpret what we mean when we don't have words. Lord, we ask that your presence will go with us out of this place and into the rest of our week that we be reflecting you into this world. It's in your son's precious name that we pray. Amen. Have a good week, everybody.

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