

Life experience, faith and relationships are a Journey. Would that there were an instruction manual or road map which told us what to expect. Instead, like baby quail we are shooed out of the nest, and what adventures, dangers and miracles we will encounter are our mystery. Military service, Travel, the births and deaths of loved ones, crises and catharses are each spiritual journeys as much as physical ones. Part of the excitement of Family genealogy is not only how far back and where we come from, but following the footsteps of those others who went before us for greater insight in how we got to be here.

One of the dilemma of Green Valley, is that very few of us are indigenous, everyone has relocated here. Vinyl siding we used in Upstate NY would melt here, thermal pane windows to keep out cold drafts are pointless; and we had no experience with tile roofs, solar panels, stucco, lacy plaster walls, cacti, rattlesnakes or bobcats. Therefore we carefully follow the footsteps of others who have gone before us.

Following others' footsteps, 3 months ago, we learned from Bob & Jane Campbell that there were contractors who could pour new cement floors over existing tile floors, for a very reasonable price. But first, after consulting with Rick Nau that the wall I wanted to remove between our Kitchen and Dining was not load-bearing, I took out the wall, bringing in natural light and air and opening up everything.

However, once that wall was gone, there was a little pony-half-wall in the way, and late afternoon on a Saturday I cut it out only to discover that I had cut the poly-butyl plumbing! What had been an affordable job, with a do-it yourself project, suddenly became hiring plumbers and electricians to pull permits and rework the house, after which I re-plastered and repainted, tomorrow Flooring begins.

Academics can be taught by reading a book or series of courses, however, there are spiritual journeys you can only travel by walking footsteps, experiencing. The difference being that life journeys, spiritual quests are very personal and subjective, based on the circumstance and choices of will by those involved. When we had Lamaze classes, every couple were going through the same experience but were also going through other family dynamics at the time. One couple had their in-laws move in with them, another moved in with theirs, one couple were finishing their dissertations, the 4<sup>th</sup> were working through the death of his mother, while Judy and I moved across country to start a new job at 9 months pregnant. Life events do not happen in isolation. It has been so abnormal that for over a year, this cloud dominated so much of life. More than "a return to normal," we had to survive COVID before we could go on with life. We cannot get married because of COVID, we cannot hold our grandchild, there can be no Graduation, we cannot go to Europe, we cannot go to the Movies, or have Committee Meetings, but as the Church we found a way.

For as long as I have known them, Pastor Diane & Katie have planned to go to Greece following Paul's Footsteps. All of this has been on hold for the last year; over the last month Pastor Diane has also been following the footsteps of her father's death and resurrection. What I believe, and am uncertain they considered before this, is that we their family and church are also part of these journeys with them. HOWEVER, for each of these journeys the starting point is the same. To STOP following the direction your life has gone. For each of us to recognize the blindness of our personal crusades. To have a time of questioning: what do I believe and who am I, hopefully such that something like scales fall off of your eyes and we see the world differently.

Part of the fun of reading the Bible is making correlation between people of faith, and sometimes even to recognize ourselves in them. Saul of Tarsus always reminds me of Elijah, both are confronted by God. Elijah was in a Cave having just won the great contest with Queen Jezebel and the Prophets of Baal, when the still small voice asks Elijah "What are you doing here?" Saul had publicly defeated Stephen and was on the Road to Damascus to arrest Jesus' Apostles and followers for execution, when a voice from heaven asks "Why are you persecuting me?" Elijah reacts, in words that also fit with Saul "I have been very zealous

for the LORD, my God!" Especially when we know that in Hebrew the phrase Zealous for the Lord and Jealous of the Lord are interchangeable, in other words to be single-minded, even obsessed.

The beauty of the Book of Acts, is that like the Gospels following Jesus, this follows the footsteps of historic persons, whose journeys teach us about struggles and miracles. As their journeys unwind, because Peter had been among Jesus' disciples who were Jewish, Peter's mission is intentionally to Jews who might become Christians. Ironically, just before Peter met the Centurion Cornelius, Peter had a vision from God, of Christian Faith being for both the Jewish and non-Jewish. Saul had been a Pharisee and persecuted all who were leading believers to become Christian, and Paul's Mission became going to the Gentiles, and Gentiles means everyone who is not Jewish, heathens like us!

Peter and Paul are regularly set up in contrast; however, both receive new names and identities from Jesus. Both have a tendency to jump to convictions that prove wrong, yet Christ does not abandon them. I had a seminary professor who gave the backhanded compliment, "You have so clearly represented the wrong answer, it makes the right self-evident." That was Simon Peter, and later Saul who became Paul. But one of the simple elements we often overlook, is that when Jesus sent Peter and the Disciples out as Apostles, Jesus sent them out in pairs. When Peter and the Council send out Paul, he was to be accompanied by Barnabas or Timothy, there is a vital importance in being commissioned to follow these faith journeys with companions.

We used to present 3<sup>rd</sup> Graders with Bibles after learning how to read them. Oddly, one of the Bibles we presented had been printed, bound and sold, omitting the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. I am certain it was a Shift change and this simply was left out after the Gospel of John and before The Letter to the Romans. But what a huge whole there would be if we did not have the Book of Acts. Were it not for Following Paul's Journeys, the Christian Church might never have come into being, or left Jerusalem. But Paul takes the Church along the traditional trade routes, eventually to the furthest extremes of the ancient world. Is that not our quest: to carry our faith, not merely as our treasure or possession through life, but that our neighbors, friends, children and grandchildren might witness the importance of faith that they would choose to have faith as well. There was a couple. She went to worship every week and he refused. She would come home telling him all about the church, God and the people. But he always had something else to do. Finally, after forty years of begging him and nagging him to come with her, she stopped. NOT that she stopped loving him, stopped believing or practicing her faith; she just stopped pushing him to believe her way. Soon thereafter, he began going to worship as well. He described that when she was pushing him to believe, he needed to push back; but when she stopped pushing and still demonstrated what her faith meant to her life, he came to realize he wanted this with her.

Whereas Jesus in the Gospels regularly presents us with the pearls of ***"Remember the Lilies of the Field"*** or ***"Blessed are the Poor;"*** to the church at Corinth, Paul describes ***"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am a noisy gong or clanging cymbal"*** to the Romans: ***"More than that, we rejoice in our suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, character produces hope, hope does not disappoint, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit."***

But there is also a very mortal (less than divine) element to Paul, who on one occasion was preaching on and on and on and on, until one youth who had propped himself up on a window ledge to listen fell asleep, and asleep fell out the window to the ground, but Paul went outside and raised him from the dead to come back inside so Paul could continue his sermon.

Or at the conclusion of this 9<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Acts... After being converted from persecuting the

faithful to being a Believer, Christians doubt whether to trust and believe Paul, and Paul becomes so zealous in his preaching as to stir up a mob, and the only way to save him was that Paul's followers lower him in a basket through a window! Can you not imagine Paul, humbly hanging between Heaven and Earth having to trust others who hold his life by the rope? As friends and neighbors again travel, as Kate and Pastor Diane follow the footsteps of Paul, we hold the rope, the lifeline between here and where they are going, praying for them on their journeys.