

Show Me Your Ways

Apostles Anglican

Doug Floyd

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Last year, Robert Redford was the only actor in a film about a man traveling across the sea. In the opening moments of the film, he writes a few words on a note:

"I'm sorry. I know that means little at this point, but I am. I tried. I think you would all agree that I tried. To be true, to be strong, to be kind, to love, to be right, but I wasn't."
*"All is lost."*¹

For the rest of the film, we learn how this man reaches a point of complete hopelessness. Eight days earlier, he wakes to discover water flooding his boat because a shipping container has punctured a hole in the hull. He repairs the hole and tries to pump out the water, but for every problem he solves, more problems appear.

His navigation system is broken. His communications are out. A raging storm damages the boat beyond repair. He abandons ship and launches an inflatable raft with supplies. He discovers that his fresh water has mixed with seawater, so he makes a solar still out of supplies on hand. But he cannot stem the tide of mounting problems.

When he finally sees a passing ship, they cannot see him and pass by in spite of his flares. By the end of the film, we see a man stripped of all his ingenuity, all his resourcefulness, all his hope. He writes a note, stuffs it in a bottle, and throws it into the sea:

"I'm sorry. I know that means little at this point, but I am. I tried. I think you would all agree that I tried. To be true, to be strong, to be kind, to love, to be right, but I wasn't."
"All is lost."

What a haunting line: *I tried. To be true, to be strong, to be kind, to love, to be right, but I wasn't.* "All is lost."

This note reveals a man lost at sea in more ways than one. Certainly, he is lost on the water with no resources left. Whatever journey he had started will end prematurely in the middle of the ocean. But he is also lost to humanity. He is sinking, and he is completely alone. He feels a need to tell someone that he failed. He needs to tell someone that all is lost.

¹ From the film "All Is Lost." Quote via http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_Is_Lost

What a desperate picture of the human condition. What a revealing picture of the human condition. Created in the image of God, humans have an amazing ability to adapt, create, grow, and respond. Turned away from the face of God, humans are also exposed in their brokenness, their brutality, their ultimate incapacity to be true, to be strong, to be kind, to love, to be right.

“All is lost.”

I thought of this film in light of today’s Psalm, because the Psalmist is asking the God, “Show me Your ways, O Lord; Teach me Your paths.” The man at sea lost his way. The Psalmist prays that he will not lose his way.

This language of paths, way, road, appears all through the Old Testament. I would suggest that it is rooted in God’s promise to lead His people into the Promised Land. In Genesis 12, we hear the Lord calling Abraham to leave his country, and go “To a land that I will show you.” Abraham’s whole story is a story of a man on journey toward the land of promise.

When Moses leads the Hebrews out of Egypt and toward the Promised Land, he is leading them to that land that God’s promised Abraham. So language of a path, a way, a road is talking about an actual path through the wilderness and into the Promised Land. But you need more than a map to enter this land. You need the grace of God.

Later this language of path and road and way will be connected to the journey of God’s people to Jerusalem, to Mt Zion, to the Temple. They will make regular trips to Jerusalem to worship the Lord and to remember that He led them out of slavery, across the wilderness and into the Promised Land. Now path, road, journey will be a reminder of their regular pilgrimage to worship at the Temple and remember that God led them into this land.

Years later, the people are sent into exile and the Temple is destroyed. Then the prophets will speak of a way, a path, a Highway of Holiness that will lead God’s people home. Daniel prays three times a day facing Jerusalem. In Daniel 9, we read his prayer, asking God to lead his people home.

The way, the path, the road is leading to Jerusalem, to Mt. Zion, to the Temple, to the Presence of the Lord. This pilgrimage to Jerusalem continues after Christ. There are maps from the Middle Ages where Jerusalem is at the heart of the world. In these maps, the East, the Orient is the navigating point instead of the North. This is because Jerusalem orients all movement in space. The people and the priest faced East toward Jerusalem

during prayer and worship. Why? They were looking for the coming of the Lord and His promise to lead His people home.

The word orient means East. People oriented their lives by turning East toward home, Jerusalem. Life as a journey becomes an image of God's people traveling toward the Presence of God, toward Jerusalem. By orienting their lives toward the Lord, and the people develop a sense of calling, purpose. Identity. Ultimately, they realized they were headed to a city, a land of promise, the New Jerusalem, the Vision of God's glory.

Today we live in a world of dis-orientation. For many people, life has no clear direction, no ultimate purpose. We make our own meaning. There is no greater call. No great sense of living. No great drama of existence. Instead of life as a journey toward the call of God, the destiny of God, it is like the man lost at sea.

"I tried. To be true, to be strong, to be kind, to love, to be right, but I wasn't." "All is lost."

Writing about the despair of a world with no vision beyond itself, Luigi Giussani quotes the poet Pavese,

*There is nothing more bitter
than the sunrise of a day on which nothing will happen;
There is nothing more bitter than uselessness...
The dragging hours
are merciless for the one who no longer waits for anything.*²

Without a purpose, humans simply exist. T.S. Eliot suggests that when humanity abandons God, they turn to the gods of Usury, Lust and Power. By abandoning God, humans are enslaved by cruel merciless gods of their own making.

This despairing unbelief of our world surrounds every day, and it affects us. It may seduce us to seek meaning in wealth, things, status. But these pursuits can be like a man taking a journey on a treadmill. He moves, he sweats, he tires, but he never arrives anywhere. He is just busy. Sadly religious and personal lives can become just busy. Constant motion. Constant pursuit of something just out of reach. But in the end, it is only empty illusion.

Then again, for others, journey can feel more like a person lost in the words without a compass. Where do I go? God what are you calling me to do? My plans and hopes didn't work out as I expected. What now?

² Cesare Pavese. Quoted in Religious Awareness in Modern Man by Luigi Giussani, page 15.

The musician Marketa Irglova gives expression to this sense of being lost in her song Without a Map. She sings,

God, I've been sent here blind to learn to see,
Remembering you were always there with me.
But do you know just how hard that's been?
Could all of this have really been foreseen?
I'd like to say a prayer, how does it go?
I'm tired. Tell me, God, does it show?
What could have called for such a handicap?
I was sent out here without a map.
All this time I've had to guess the way,
To keep moving when I wished to stay.
I've been wrong as much as I've been right.³

These are honest struggles in a world of constant change. Some days it does feel like we awake on a raft in the middle of a vast ocean with no clear direction and no clear sense of what do I do now, where do I go. And the haunting words of the man adrift in the ocean before he finally gives up,

I tried. To be true, to be strong, to be kind, to love, to be right, but I wasn't." "All is lost."

As we think about the challenge of living in a culture adrift, we might think of Psalm 25 as a way of re-orienting our lives. The Psalm might give us a glimpse of a map that is a living relationship. We might also read the Psalm in light of Hebrews 4 and see how it opens up the way of Sabbath rest. If you are interested, we'll discuss the relation to Sabbath this coming Wednesday. Today, let us simply meditate upon the prayer of the Psalmist as a cry for guidance to travel this journey into the way of life.

The Psalmist cries out to God,

*To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul. ² O my God, I trust in You;
Let me not be ashamed;
Let not my enemies triumph over me.⁴*

Hear those words, "Let me not be ashamed." Think of that in terms of our life journey. Lord, let my life not be wasted. Let me not end my days with the cry, "All is lost." Lord,

³ Marketa Irglova. "Without a Map" from the album Muna.

⁴ *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Ps 25:1–2. (All subsequent quotes from Scripture are from the NKJV.)

let me not be ashamed. With the end in mind, he begins with words, “To you O LORD, I lift up my soul.”

He cries out to the God who has redeemed Him. The word LORD stands in for the covenant name of God. He is crying out to the God who has rescued Him and His people. He is “lifting up his soul” to God. Every week as we approach the Holy Eucharist, we “lift up our hearts.” We are following in the prayer of the Psalmist.

He is lifting up His soul in worship, in adoration before the Lord who has redeemed Him. In lifting up His soul, he is also bearing his soul. He brings his love and adoration as well as his fear and his sin. All that he is, he lifts up or bears before the Lord.

In verse 7, he prays

*Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions;
According to Your mercy remember me,
For Your goodness' sake, O Lord.*

The Psalmist brings his own brokenness before the Lord. He confesses his own desolation before the Lord. In verses 16, 17 and 18, he cries,

*¹⁶ Turn Yourself to me, and have mercy on me,
For I am desolate and afflicted.
¹⁷ The troubles of my heart have enlarged;
Bring me out of my distresses!
¹⁸ Look on my affliction and my pain,
And forgive all my sins.*

He brings his sins, his afflictions, his distresses, and his pain before the Lord in worship. These are all inward struggles of his soul. He brings the sins of his youth and his transgressions, which might be the sins of his maturity. Youthful sins are sins of passion like lust and anger. The passionate heart can be seduced away from God by the desires and frustrations of the moment. Lord have mercy, may the passions not lead me astray. The Proverbs give us a picture of the passions seducing us off the path of the Lord. These passions lead to death.

But these sins of maturity have a different quality. Instead of passions, we might speak of sins that have stewed deep in the heart over time. Hebrews warns against a root of bitterness. Proverbs 2 gives us a picture of a man who has left the path of God to follow the wicked. Discouragement, resentments, disappointments, unresolved grief. The pain of life can cause us to become cold to God and others. These sins of maturity are terrifying because they can entomb us in a living death.

The Psalmist brings all his internal afflictions before the Lord. Have mercy. Have mercy. He cries,

*According to Your mercy remember me,
For Your goodness' sake, O Lord. (Psalm 25:7)*

And again he cries,

*Keep my soul, and deliver me;
Let me not be ashamed, for I put my trust in You. (Psalm 25:20)*

His only hope in battling the struggles of his heart is the grace of God. So we like the Psalmist, come in worship today and each day. We lift up our hearts, our soul, our battered and bruised egos, our frailties, our pains, our lusts. We cry out, "According to your mercy, remember me."

The Psalmist also brings the struggles in the world around him before the Lord.

*Let not my enemies triumph over me.
³ Indeed, let no one who waits on You be ashamed;
Let those be ashamed who deal treacherously without cause. (Psalm 25:2-3)*

And again he cries,

*¹⁹ Consider my enemies, for they are many;
And they hate me with cruel hatred. (Psalm 25:19)*

The outer world is dangerous. There are real enemies who hate him and would destroy him. The enemy of our souls would love to see us lost at sea, would love to hear us abandon all hope, would love to see us ashamed and forsaken. He prowls and preys against us. In the changing circumstances of our daily lives, our enemy would love to seduce us away from God and drive us away in disillusionment.

A job can be fulfilling and express the deep gifting of who we are. But then suddenly a change. Maybe a new boss. New directives from the management. Suddenly the place of joy can become a place of weariness, discouragement and defeat. And all along, the enemy whispers to us with lies that embitter and distress.

Relationships can sour. Our health may fail. Disappointments may overwhelm. Bitterness may take root. The Psalmist lifts us his fears of the enemies who would shame, defeat and destroy him. Oh Lord, have mercy.

- ²⁰ *Keep my soul, and deliver me;
Let me not be ashamed, for I put my trust in You.*
- ²¹ *Let integrity and uprightness preserve me,
For I wait for You. (Psalm 25:20-21)*

As he navigates this life, as he walks the journey toward the fullness of God's presence, he cries out for guidance, for direction,

- ⁴ *Show me Your ways, O Lord;
Teach me Your paths.*
- ⁵ *Lead me in Your truth and teach me,
For You are the God of my salvation;
On You I wait all the day. (Psalm 25:4-5)*

He waits upon the Lord. He knows that it is the good pleasure of our God to guide and teach his sinful, broken people,

- ⁸ *Good and upright is the Lord;
Therefore He teaches sinners in the way.*
- ⁹ *The humble He guides in justice,
And the humble He teaches His way.*
- ¹⁰ *All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth,
To such as keep His covenant and His testimonies. (Psalm 25:8-10)*

I love this. "All the paths of the Lord *are* mercy and truth." The path of the Lord reveals the heart of the Lord, mercy and truth mercy and lovingkindness. To know the way of the Lord is to know the character of the Lord. Then we hear this beautiful promise of those who seek to walk in the way of the Lord,

- ¹² *Who is the man that fears the Lord?
Him shall He teach in the way He chooses.*
- ¹³ *He himself shall dwell in prosperity,
And his descendants shall inherit the earth.*
- ¹⁴ *The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him,
And He will show them His covenant. (Psalm 25:12-14)*

What is this secret of the Lord? This is a word of intimacy; it is also word that means friendship. Think of the disciples. In John 15, Jesus no longer calls them servants but friends. He reveals to his friends, his disciples that He is the way, the path, the road. If we are to walk through this life, this journey without being ashamed, we must learn to trust in Him, to rest in His faithful love. For He will lead his friends into the fullness of love.

This path, this way, this journey will lead through harsh seas. It will lead through death valleys. It will lead through dark and lonely places, where all we have is the Word as a lamp unto our feet. But our Lord is faithful. He will guide. He will lead.

So we lift up our souls, our hearts unto the Lord. Finally, the Psalmist ends with a prayer for the whole communion of faith,

²² *Redeem Israel, O God,
Out of all their troubles! (Psalm 25:22)*

He realizes that even as he is not alone. He is journeying in a community, a communion. So his prayer, becomes a prayer of the communion, of the people of God.

We are on journey. It is only by God's grace, we are not lost at sea. We may not always know the way forward, but we know One who is leading us forward. He leads us in the midst of a world that is adrift. We may feel the fears and doubts and struggles in this journey, but we cultivate a life of remembering His goodness, His faithfulness. So we return again and again and again to the throne of mercy and grace. This might help us to begin understanding the call and rhythm of Sabbath.

I began with a story about a man at sea who writes,

*"I'm sorry. I know that means little at this point, but I am. I tried. I think you would all agree that I tried. To be true, to be strong, to be kind, to love, to be right, but I wasn't."
"All is lost."*

I end with a Psalmist who teaches us to bring our fears, our sins, our struggles, our afflictions and ask the Lord to lead us, to love us, to befriend us, to teach us to rest in His faithful love. It is by His lovingkindness that we can say all is not lost, but in Christ all is found.