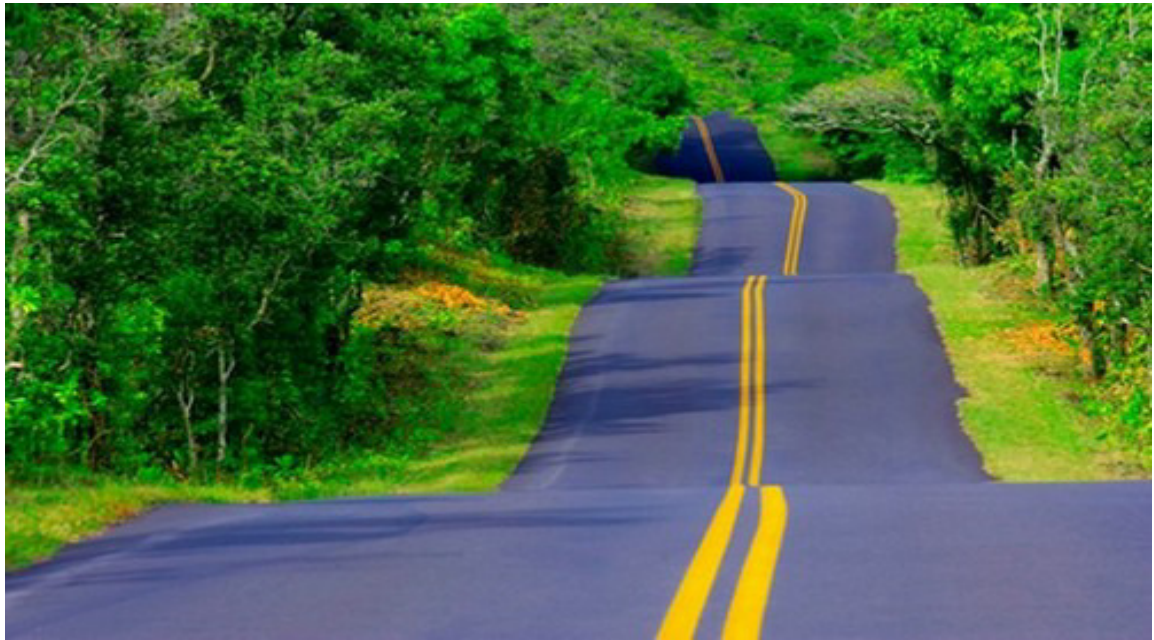


Where are you going?



Season of Journey

“The life you have led doesn’t need to be the only life you have.”

Anna Quindlen - Author

There are few of us who don’t like travel. Perhaps it’s an inherent quality of human beings that experiencing distant places, different sights and having different experiences is incredibly satisfying. Most of us can claim to have experienced travel in some way, shape or form – and we have the photos, the souvenirs and the memories to prove it. Certainly it wouldn’t be too hard to write a whole lot about travel experiences and, for the most part it would make for some interesting and hopefully entertaining reading.

But perhaps the quote I have used above from American author Anna Quindlen (and I assure you there are plenty of great quotes about travelling) will give you a clue about the nature of this *Season of Journey*. Our Journeying Season will focus on a series of travel-related questions starting with ‘Where are you/we going?’ – not in a physical sense, but in a broad metaphorical sense. Where are you going in a ‘life journey’ sense? The parallels that exist between travel and life are many, as are the questions we ask around them. As the band Rascal Flatts declare in their 90’s song “Life is a highway, I’m gonna ride it all night long”.

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Along with my various incredibly wise, thought provoking and entertaining dialogue, I've also included some *discussion points and questions*. I hope you'll take the opportunity to think about or discuss these. I hope they'll make the journey more interesting. The discussion points can be used in a number of ways. You can ask and maybe answer the questions as an *individual*, or you could switch the focus to *our journey* as a faith community ie where are *we* (as a Christian faith community/church) going etc etc. Remember – there are no right answers to any of these questions.

I'll also say up front that my dialogue here won't try to provide answers. I'm neither a life-coach nor a psychologist. I've realised I'm better at asking questions than providing answers. Through this document I simply share my thoughts – thinking out aloud if you like. Take on board what you wish. Agree or disagree as you see fit. I'm good with that.

So, where are you¹ going?

During this year, I was lucky enough to go on a guided tour to India. As you might expect with a guided tour, pretty much all things were organised in advance – flights, accommodation, transport, food, drink, destinations – even travel companions (luckily we all got on well). For a relatively hefty price, everything was looked after and it was almost inevitable that I'd have a great time and that all my expectations would be met - and they were!



But life's journey is rarely quite that organised and as you well know, expectations are sometimes met, but often not met. We can plan our life journeys up to a certain extent, but we'd be naïve to believe that everything in our path is known and certain. We'd be foolish to think we know everything we'll encounter and be prepared for it. Life simply doesn't work that way.

Do you have a plan for your life?

Discussion points

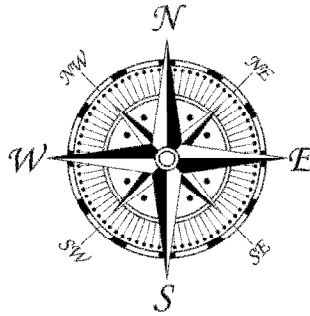
- Do you have a plan for your life? Feel free to share it. It may be detailed or very, very broad.
- Do we *have* to know where we're going? Do we *have* to have a map?
- Do you ever feel like you're the only person who hasn't got a map?
- Do you feel like your journey is on track? Are you going where you thought you would be?

¹and when I say 'you', I can just as easily say 'we'. When I say 'your' I am referring either to you as an individual or as a group.

“We cannot discover new oceans unless we have the courage to lose sight of the shore.”

Andre Gide

Interestingly, the best things about my trip to India were the things I didn't expect. Each day, I would see something or experience something that was quite 'out of the box'. That's part of the wonderful thing about India – that's part of the wonderful thing about travel. Luckily the unexpected things I saw in India were positive things (like the very friendly people and architecture). Just as easily, that unexpected thing could have been something hugely negative – like rabies.



So, things we don't expect to happen in life, happen. They happen on the journey. That's a reality. All I can offer is the old adage “That's life”. My anecdotal view is that sometimes good things happen, sometimes bad things happen. “I didn't expect to encounter that!” I guess the important thing is how we respond to them. Sometimes we can plan for good things, often good things don't appear on the horizon.

Discussion points

- What have been unexpected positive things in your journey?
- In your life, consider and share a good thing you planned for and achieved.
- What have been unexpected negative things in your journey?
- How did you respond to each? What have been the results this far further down the track?
- Do you agree with the notion that unexpected things make for the spice of life?
- How do you respond to the notion that you have little control over the future?

Why are you going?

One key question in all journeys I guess, is *Why* are you going?

Continuing on my trip to India, I'll put my hand up and say that my motivation was tourism. I was curious and I wanted to see some different things. On a deeper level, I went, keen to learn stuff – to enrich my views and understanding of the world.

In life's journey generally, I guess we don't have choice. We do it as individuals, and take on board what comes along. Maybe then, the following questions might be prudent to ask of an organisation or in the context of this document, a faith community. The questions may be relevant to you as a traveler in a faith community?

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Discussion points

- Why do you think we are on this journey? What is our motivation?
- Have you been on this journey all of your life, or did you join-up mid-stream? Would you like to share your experience?
- Have you got off this journey then got back on?
- Have you been on this journey (with a faith community) then simply got off?

“People don’t take trips, trips take people.”

John Steinbeck

How will you get there?

I live on an island – Australia - that’s an island (a very big one). So, when I decided to go to India, I had a limited range of choices about *how* to get there. It was either going to be on a plane or a ship – or swim. Have I missed anything?

It’s a bit harder to describe the way you ‘get there’ in your life journey. Maybe one way to ‘get there’ depends on stuff like attitude. I could be an optimist or a pessimist. I could be totally invested in life outcomes, or simply take it as it comes. I could have amazing resilience, or falter with each challenge - big or small. I could conduct regular reviews ie conduct a regular stock-take of my progress in the journey and make conscious direction adjustments. I could live with heavy reliance on others ie work as a team, or reliance totally on self, or combinations of both.

I could have heavy reliance on God to guide me.....or none at all.

I do know that a gift we have been given is that of individuality. We are all different. There are *no right answers*.

Discussion points

- Do you have a general approach to life? Have you ever considered this question?
- Is there anything about your approach to life that you’d like to change?
- If you could change your approach to life, what would you like it to be? If there was someone you’d like to emulate, who would it be?
- Has your approach to life changed over the course of your life? What has brought on the change?
- Do you lean on others for support? Discuss further.

What will you take?

When I went to India, there were certain things I packed. Let’s see.....I took a camera, clothes, maps, books and an assortment of medications - particularly gastric medications. I knew vaguely what to expect and what I needed to take with me on the trip (luckily I didn’t need to use the stomach pills).



If you view life as a journey, it might be interesting to hear what individuals or groups think they need to take. Examples might include things like wealth, service to others, education, a map or compass (ie a plan), health, confidence, values or faith. So what will you take?

Discussion points

- What will you take on life's journey? What do you think is important to have?
- Looking back at the journey so far, is there anything you wished you'd packed – but didn't? ie "I wish I'd...."
- What for you, has been the *most important thing* in your life-journey travel bag?
- Have you an opportunity now to *re-pack* and get the thing you left behind for the remainder of your journey?
- What values do you think are important on the journey?

"Travel is the only thing you buy that makes you richer."

Anonymous

Being brave in the journey

Have you ever been on a fearful journey? For me, going to India was relatively easy. I was with my brothers as part of a group who shared the decision making. We were on an organised tour where everything would be looked after for us. We had an itinerary which told us exactly where we were going and how we'd get there. So, even though India is a quite different and at times a quite confronting place, I wasn't nervous or frightened.

Rewind back four years ago when I was lucky enough to go to Nepal. That was a different experience. I was alone. I had no idea what to expect. The language was different, the culture different. I had to make eating, travel and accommodation arrangements myself and I had no one to bounce ideas and impressions off. As my flight landed in Kathmandu, I remember saying a prayer asking God for support and guidance.

I'm pleased to report that I arrived, survived and thrived. But boy, at the time I remember thinking I had to be brave in the journey.

Looking at my life to date, I'll be realistic. I have had to face relatively few fears. I've rarely had to be *really* brave. Even my trip to Nepal was relatively tame. But many people *do* have to be brave in life's journey. Life has a way of throwing up things that scare or challenge us. Am I looking at my two travel experiences too simplistically by suggesting that the difference between the two was that the easier one was made

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easier by the fact that I travelled with others? I think it was. There was for me, safety in numbers. Do you agree?

Discussion points

- Describe/share a travel experience where you feel you had to be brave.
- Share a life experience where you feel you had to be brave.
- Have you ever had to change the course of your life journey because obstacles became too difficult to overcome?
- If you live and operate alone, do you consider yourself to be brave?
- What are your 'life challenges'?
- Life is made easier when you're part of a group. Do you agree?

"Not all those who wander are lost."

J.R.R. Tolkien

How will we know when we get there?

As a kid, in the first half-hour of a seven hour drive to Pambula Beach on the NSW South Coast, I remember driving my parents mad by asking 'Are we there yet?' I continued my questioning for each and every mile of the journey. Wow! What a great kid!

Of course, life is an endless journey – we don't arrive. Do you agree?

I guess that the closest thing to arrival we'll experience is a sense of contentedness, of satisfaction with a life well lived. Possibly a life where you've been true to what you believe in and where you are pleased with the things you have done.

Discussion points

- Life is an endless journey – we don't arrive. Do you agree?
- Can you identify any 'arrival-points' (or landmarks) in your journey?
- Complete this sentence – "I'll know I've arrived when....."

Exodus

Perhaps the most obvious travel story from the Old Testament is that of the Exodus. In a nutshell.....Moses frees the captive Israelites from Egypt, the Red Sea is miraculously parted and they cross. Moses leads the group out into the wilderness where they wander for forty years before arriving in the Promised Land.

Quite a simple story really, but one with some things to consider and learn from.

Forty years is a long time to be on the road. Consider that many/most wouldn't have known that their wanderings would last forty years. I wonder would the story have turned out differently had they known of the magnitude of the journey when they set out? In fact, consider that at that time in history, the average life expectancy would have been close to forty years. That means that many on the journey set out understanding that they'd never actually reach the promised-land. I imagine that many people spent their *entire lives* on this iconic journey, spurred on only by a promise of getting to the promised-land.

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A core element of this story is that from the outset, Moses (guided by and through his faith in God) had to contend with the doubts and complaints of the travelers. He himself experienced doubts and made complaints. The entire group fell from faith numerous times. They were tired, hungry, without a home to return to. Life for them was a challenge.

At the heart of this story is a persistent (though often waning) faith that God was with them and guiding them through the journey. As we journey, it is likely that we often lose sight of, and faith in God. But God is ever present, walking beside us even when the journey is long and hard.

Have you ever started a journey not knowing (or planning for) where you're going? What happened?

Have you ever made a connection between the wandering people of Israel and the many people today who are refugees? To go back would mean slavery or death. The way ahead was unknown – but they moved ahead in faith. I asked earlier 'Why are we going?' Have you ever considered the fact that refugees by definition must respond with "We don't have a choice".

I'm sure that much could be said about journeying in the context of the life of Jesus.

I am impacted on the fact that from an early age, Jesus was aware of *the plan*. He was aware of the path that lay ahead – a path of mission, enlightenment, salvation, execution and resurrection.

I think I'm right in suggesting that he could have 'got off the trip' at any time. In the garden, days prior to his crucifixion, Jesus wrestles with God. 'Change this path' he implores – and yet, aware of God's plan for him, he obediently and faithfully follows the journey that results in humiliation and agonising death – in exchange for the forgiveness of our sins, and for our salvation.

Sometimes in life, we can't see the way ahead. We (like Jesus) may want to get off the journey we're on. Sometimes the journey might go to places we never expected. Maybe it doesn't turn out the way you planned. I believe though, God walks with us. Even when we think we're alone, I believe that God knows us and is beside us.

Many of you will be familiar with the following famous piece of writing.

Footprints in the Sand



One night a man had a dream.
He dreamed he was walking along
the beach with the Lord.

Across the dark sky flashed scenes from his life.
For each scene, he noticed
two sets of footprints in the sand,
one belonging to him and the other to the Lord.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him,
he looked back at the footprints in the sand.
He noticed that many times along the path of his life
there was only one set of footprints.
He also noticed that it happened at the
very lowest and saddest times in his life.
This bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it.

"Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you,
you'd walk with me all the way.
But I have noticed that during the most
troublesome times in my life there is
only one set of footprints.
I don't understand why when I needed you most
you would leave me."

The Lord replied "My precious, precious child,
I love you and would never leave you.
During your times of trial and suffering,
when you see only one set of footprints in the sand,
it was then that I carried you."

I hope that this *Season of Journeying* will result in much thought and discussion about our life journey – either as individuals or as a community. There are numerous references in the Bible about journeying – most of them with something to encourage faith in God who is ever-present on our journey. Whilst any number of references would suit, on this occasion I've picked Luke 4:10 -

'He will put his angels in charge of you to watch over you carefully.'

A final story.....

A final (true) story from my India travelogue – and by the way, my thanks to you for enduring it!

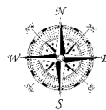
At the end of visiting a site (I can't remember which) I overheard a discussion between one of our touring group and my brother Tim. After a career of using power tools, Tim is a bit deaf.....well actually a *lot* deaf.

Whatever we'd done that day prompted our travel companion to comment "Wasn't that *awful!?!?*" Tim's response..... "Yeah.....that was *awesome!*"

That says a lot about India, and it says a lot about my brother. It also says a lot about the nature of journeying. We all take on board our perceptions based on our own experiences.



I hope that your journey is *awesome* – though the nature of journeying dictates that parts may well be awful. Hold fast to faith that in the journey, God doesn't walk ahead of you, nor behind you. Hold fast to faith that God walks beside you.



Prayer

I've mentioned previously, that an ignition-point for the entire Seasons process was a recognition that we as a Christian faith community, need to have a greater focus on prayer.

In the context of the Season of Journey, through prayer we are offered a chance to reflect on the places we find ourselves – either individually or as a community – and to learn.

Through prayer we have opportunity to enter into dialogue with God who exists at the core of our faith – and to reflect.

Through prayer we create a period of 'time-out', an opportunity to stop, look and listen. A chance to think and consider, dream and contemplate – and to learn.

Through prayer we are challenged to hope and dream – to discern what our place and our calling is – and to give thanks.

Through prayer we have an opportunity to share and to learn.

As a group or as an individual you are encouraged to pray. You may wish to use this as a prompt:

Loving God

Hear our prayers in this our season of journey.

*We pray for your hand of hope, faith and love for all people in their journey
We pray that you'll be in the hearts and consciousness of all people in their lives.*

May you guide all, as they journey in faith.

We pray for direction and decision making

Be with those who are lost and looking for direction and purpose. Be their light in times of darkness.

We pray for those who are refugees. Help them find places of safety and belonging. Make their journeying safe.

Be with those who in the journey, find it hard to imagine a future - those who sit by the way, not knowing how to continue or where to continue to.

We give thanks for those who lead. May they be led by you in wisdom and grace. Make the path clear and the journey one of patience and compassion.

We pray for ourselves as we walk the road. May we listen for your voice, may we see your light to guide us and may we have confidence in your presence beside us in the journey.

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Be with us loving God as we journey.

Amen

The miracle of silent prayer.

Consider silent prayer and meditation. As a group or individual, don't be afraid to allow groups periods of silence during which those who are present can allow themselves to focus on whatever they feel is important.

Outreach

We are hopeful that you and your group will decide on some sort of outreach activity (or activities) as part of the Season of Journey. Through outreach we all have an opportunity to learn much about our community, our place in that community and our calling when we respond in the name of Christ.

The choice of outreach activity and the extent to which your group engages this, is wholly the decision of you and/or your group. It may be as big or as small as you decide.

It is hoped that your group will embrace the outreach part of this process as it presents possibilities for very real positive change for others and as such, represents a critical part of ministry in the name of Christ.

IMPORTANT - Recognize that in outreach, we are dealing with other people – some we know, some we don't. Ensure that actions we do for other people either directly or indirectly, are done with their permission. If dealing with a person or an organization, obtain permission first. Always respect other people's privacy and right to confidentiality.

Create

You are invited to contribute to the season's topic creatively. This could mean music, artwork, craftwork, poetry, drama etc. How do you respond to the theme of 'Journey' creatively? It's exciting here to consider the possibilities for creative response, and once again, groups or individuals are invited to engage in this part of the process in whatever way they feel comfortable.

Celebration

At the conclusion of the Season and our focus on Journey, it would be great for your group to *celebrate* the journey and any outcomes that have been experienced. Celebration can take whatever form your group wishes it to. It may extend simply to a quiet prayer of thanks, through to a presentation or celebration in worship.

Finally.....

We encourage your group to embrace the possibilities of *Seasons*. If you require further information or assistance, please get in touch with one of the Leaders.

Finally, we give thanks to God for the talents and energies of our people.

Coatesville Leadership Group