

Walking Backwards

Scripture: Hebrews 3:15 – 19 and Exodus 33:12 – 23

9/11/22

A story to start today's message:

A man had a very old dog whose back legs were very weak. The dog preferred to walk on carpeted floors. The dog felt safe on carpeted floors. Oh, the dog's walk had a limp but on carpet the old dog felt more sure footed. If the old dog ever walked across a non-carpeted area, he would always walk backwards. Yes, the old dog would walk backwards on vinyl floors, wood floors, and on the patio deck. This old dog would make everyone laugh as he would walk backwards on non-carpeted floors.

Just like this old dog, we often find ourselves walking backwards. We walk backwards when we are afraid of the future. We walk backwards when we cannot relinquish the past and venture into the future. We walk backwards when we dwell on our past sins that we have already repented and been given forgiveness. Often we receive forgiveness but we cannot let go of the past - we walk backwards!

We walk backwards when we long for people who have passed away and we cannot get past our grief. We walk backwards when we long for things as they use to be. We walk backwards when we share with others that the past was so much better.

In our scripture reading from the Book of Hebrews, the Israelites walked backwards many times as they traveled from Egypt to Canaan. Their backwards attitude cost them many years of wandering in the desert. They missed the power of God's miracles right before their eyes. Think about all the stuff the people of Israel in Moses' time saw?

*They saw the miracles of God through Moses before their exile ended in the seven plagues of Egypt.

*They saw the wall of fire that protected the people from the Egyptian chariots. *They saw the Red Sea part which led them to safety. *They saw the walls of water collapse upon the Egyptian army and save God's people.

But yet, they walked backwards at times when they yelled aloud that things were much better back in Egypt. They walked backwards when they built golden idols before God. They walked backwards when they complained to Moses about no food, and when God gave them manna, they complained about no variety in food. They walked backwards all the time in the desert. They missed the power of God's miracles right before their eyes and they were not allowed to enter the Promised Land.

Are you walking backwards? Are you missing what God has placed right in front of you? Are you walking backwards because you live in the past and are afraid of the future? Are you walking backwards because you cannot accept God's forgiveness for past transgressions? Are you walking backwards because there is a grief from your past that you cannot let go of? Are you walking backwards and you cannot see the miracles of God right in front of you? Are your eyes closed to the miracles of God because you are walking backwards?

Are we walking backwards? Are we missing what God has placed right in front of us? Are we walking backwards because we live in the past and are afraid of the future? Are we walking backwards because we cannot accept God's forgiveness for past transgressions? Are we walking backwards because there is a grief from our past that we cannot let go of? Are we walking backwards and we cannot see the miracles of God right in front of us? Are our eyes closed to the miracles of God because we are walking backwards?

The problem with walking backwards is that you cannot see where you are going! Can you see where you are going? Can we see where the church is going?

Let me share a story about a storm – in 1763, a young minister named Augustus Toplady, was traveling on the cliff side roads in Somerset, England. There were great flashes of lighting and a mighty storm was approaching so he ducked into a cave on the cliff side to escape the storm. Augustus walked backwards into the cave.

Rain pounded the area outside of the cave and lighting seemed to strike right outside the cave. As the young minister looked out of the cave, he pondered how lucky he was find shelter in the storm. Even though everything outside was angry, he was at peace in the cave! He sat down in the cave and started writing the words for a hymn – ‘Rock of Ages’ which includes a very memorable opening line of – *Rock of Ages, cleft for me. Let me hide myself in thee*’.

Many people think Augustus was experiencing what Moses felt in our second scripture reading from Exodus. In this reading, Moses was seeking God’s reassurance and God’s response to his situation. Moses asked God to reveal His glory to him and God answered graciously knowing that no one may see him and live. God tucked Moses into the rocks when he passed by, letting Moses to only see God’s back. And Moses knew that God was with him.

We can trust that just as God said to Moses – *My presence will go with you*. So too we can find refuge in God. We may experience many storms in our lives, as did Moses and Augustus, but when we cry out to God, God will give us the peace of his presence, no matter if we walk forwards or backwards into his glory!

Let us pray:

Heavenly Lord, we believe in you. Help us to walk confidently forward or backwards in our faith in you. Let us walk towards the abundant life you have promised through Jesus Christ.

Father God, help us to trust that you are with us, even during the great storms of life. AMEN.

Today is a very special Sunday in which we will walk forward, not backwards, to do a reaffirmation our faith in Jesus Christ.

Those doing this virtually are: Joshua Plocinski, Kristen Plocinski, Kitty Williams, Emily Swett, Josh Fisher, Pat Drizd, Carol Gesell, Richard Gesell, Rosemary Biggart, and Rob Biggart.

We will pour a pitcher of ocean water out to recognize their reaffirmation of faith in Jesus Christ.

For some of us here in the Chapel, they will go into the ocean and have a pitcher of ocean water poured over their heads to reaffirm their faith in Jesus Christ. They are: Bill Johnston, Mary Johnston, Charlie Hopkins, Marc Strauss, and Linda Strauss.

And for some of us here in the Chapel, they will go into the ocean and immerse themselves under a wave as a visible sign of their reaffirming of their faith in Jesus Christ. They are: Patty Enders, Mary Johnston, Jesse Lynch, and Sheri Lynch.

In life, we have ebbs and flows, like tides in our faith. We will, at times, have highs and lows in our life. We will get knocked down by the waves of life. If the water is calm or if the water is rough, it is an illustration of life on earth. God meets us in the middle of life so why wouldn't God's grace be displayed in the ocean waters he created?

So reaffirming one's faith in Jesus Christ is very appropriate to been done in the ocean.

Let us conclude our service in the Chapel by listening to Bill & Mary Johnston share 'At the River'.

Now, let us journey to the beach.