

## REMINDED OF THE JOURNEY

Last Saturday I had the honour to officiate the funeral for one of my church members. Usually at a funeral we take time to remember the journey we have had with the deceased, but on Saturday, I found myself also reminded of the journey God has led me on after spotting some familiar faces from my past in attendance.

Before the service I spotted a person who attended Brock University at the same time I did forty years ago. I was studying to become an accountant back then and had no idea at the time that God would eventually call me to become a minister. I don't know if he recognized me or not after all these years when I officiated the service. My Grade 2 teacher was also in attendance at this funeral, and I had the chance to talk with her afterward. She said to me, "I can't believe you stood up there and led the service. You were such a quiet and shy kid in my class." She was not wrong. I shared with her how I was just as shy and quiet when I first got my call from God to become a minister, but He has given me the gifts to now be able to do this. Then I had the chance to speak to the father of somebody I went to high school with. I was surprised to learn from the father that his son is now living and working in France. Normally at a funeral I am reminded of the journey I have had with the deceased, but on Saturday, God used these people to point out the journey He has been leading me on.

Funerals can be one opportunity God will use to remind us of the journey He has been leading us and others on. Another means by which God will remind us about the journeys He has taken people on happens when we read stories in the Bible. On Monday morning while reading my Bible I was reminded of the journey on which God took Ezra and many Jews who had been living in exile. After 70 years of living in exile in Babylon, captives from Judah were allowed to return to their homeland. Ezra was part of the second group of exiles who returned to Jerusalem. They had to journey approximately 900 miles on foot which would take them about four months to complete. Much of this journey took them through dangerous territories and spots that were difficult to navigate. Ezra recognized the need for God's guidance and protection on this journey, so he gave the following orders to his fellow travellers:

**And there by the Ahava Canal, I gave orders for all of us to fast and humble ourselves before our God. We prayed that He would give us a safe journey and protect us, our children and our goods as we traveled. So we fasted and earnestly prayed that our God would take care of us, and He heard our prayer.**

Naturally Ezra made physical preparations for the journey that they were about to undertake, but as we see reflected in these words, he prepared everyone for it spiritually as well. By praying and fasting, Ezra and the people were showing their ***dependence on God for protection; their faith that God was in control; and their affirmation they were not strong, nor wise enough to make the journey without Him.*** Even though Ezra knew God and His promises, he did not take them for granted. He realized the importance for everyone to pray constantly along the way in order to ensure their faith in God was strong enough to trust Him to help them overcome whatever obstacles they might encounter. Seeing here how Ezra approached his journey, the question I think we need to honestly consider is whether we are making these same spiritual preparations in our own life travels?

- Like Ezra, do we recognize our need to ask God for guidance and protection each day on our journey?
- Do we think we can make this journey simply in our own strength or like Ezra do we understand we are not strong enough to make the journey without God?
- Have we prepared well for our journey by taking the time to keep God first and foremost in our lives and trusting Him to help us overcome whatever lies ahead?

God has planned out a journey for each and every one of us. Let's make sure we make the most of this journey by continuing to stay ***strong spiritually as we move forward.*** This will make our journeys so much easier and blessed.

***Keep safe and God Bless,***

***Pastor Dean***