

# PATHWAYS

**February 2021**

I want to now pause and show you a series of eight images called “Pathways”. They constitute a backdrop on our desktop computer at home. It is a series of beautiful photos of various paths or tracks and it cycles between them. There are tracks through meadows filled with flowers, tracks along craggy cliff-tops, tracks winding through lush forest glades, paths between paddocks separated by rustic fences in need of repair, and tracks along the shorefront beside a rugged and restless ocean. In all cases these paths take twists and turns, meander up and downhill and disappear into the distance, around the corner, over the hill, into the mist.

I find these backdrops very restful and thought-provoking in a way. I keep thinking “Gee I would like to be there! I would like to walk that path and see where it leads”!

Which brings me to my main point – we are all on a journey of some form or other. And in our journeys we have a starting point, we travel through some territory and we aim for a destination.

We have so many starting points don't we? It may be because we need to seek a new country like the asylum seekers who are fleeing for the lives – many of whom are trying desperately to come to Australia. It may be because we have to leave an old phase of our lives and move on; perhaps because a loved one has died, perhaps because we have lost our job, or we have needed to downsize as we grow older. Our departure point may be full of anticipation and excitement as we prepare to head off on a holiday.

There are so many human stories at the departure lounge of an airport. Some full of excitement and expectation, some full of tears knowing we are saying goodbye to someone we may not see again for a long time - maybe never! I much prefer watching at the arrival lounge –welcoming arms, tears of joy, reunions, celebrations – usually so much happier!

Then of course there is the territory we need to travel through; and often this is just as enjoyable as our final destination. So often we rush to get somewhere without appreciating the journey itself. In fact in many journeys, we are quite sad when our journey has come to an end. This is true of course for sightseeing trips and cruises, but it might also apply to meeting a new travelling companion with whom things have just clicked. There can be a certain stimulation that goes with journeys – a stimulation that we miss when we have to resume our old routine.

And finally we come to the destination and we hopefully fulfill the purpose of our journey. In the Wizard of Oz (my favourite movie!), Dorothy finally reaches the emerald city of Oz and faces the frightening wizard – who turns out not to be very frightening at all. And Dorothy, the straw man, the tin man and the lion all find out that the things they had learnt on the way were indeed the answers to their various quests. The straw man found a brain, the tin man found a heart, the lion found courage and Dorothy found a way back home to Kansas.

There is another more recent movie “The Way” which tells the story of Thomas, Tom, an American doctor come to France to collect the body of his son recently killed in the Pyrenees. He is irascible, and his life in the States has been insular and material – and yet he sets out to complete the pilgrimage on the “Camino de Santiago” – the Way of St James - on behalf of his son and to honour him. En route he rather reluctantly teams up with a Dutchman trying to lose weight, a Canadian woman trying to recover from an abusive husband and to quit smoking and an Irish writer with writer’s block. All have their own problems, and all are seeking solutions by way of this spiritual pilgrimage. When Tom finally reaches the end and sprinkles his son’s ashes into the ocean, he is a changed man now seeing the difference between the life we live and the life we choose. And again, it is the journey that counts.

The Bible is full of journeys:-

- The Children of Israel journeying from Egypt into the Promised Land
- The holy family fleeing to Egypt with the baby Jesus.
- The journey of Jesus inexorably headed for Jerusalem and a cross. A journey we think about particularly during this Lenten season
- The two travellers journeying to Emmaus.

- The four journeys of Paul around the known world at the time.

The paths on my computer screen are full of unexpected twists and turns, of highs and lows, of rough and smooth patches, and at some points even looking as though they are backtracking.

Life is also like this I feel. We follow paths without knowing exactly where they are leading. We certainly have joys and sadness's, dreams that never eventuate, unexpected events with which we need to deal. We also have rough and smooth, and at some times we even feel as if we are going backwards. Too often life is "not so much a matter of holding good cards but of playing a poor hand well" (as my grandmother used to tell me) and how true this is. In all this our Christian faith can be a wonderful strength and support.

It can tell us that we are indeed on a journey and no matter how difficult and uncertain it may be, there is a destination too wonderful for mere words to describe. As Jesus said

*"In my Father's House are many mansions, I go to prepare a place for you".*

St Paul, in Corinthians, puts it this way,

*No eye has seen,  
No ear has heard,  
No mind has conceived  
What God has prepared for those who love him.*

It is this hope which comes through so strongly in the negro spirituals, who were having an extremely difficult and almost hopeless journey.

*"I got a robe – you got a robe, all God's chillun got a robe"  
"There is a Balm in Gilead"  
To make the wounded whole ;  
There's power enough in heaven,  
To cure a sin-sick soul."*

But our faith tells us more – much more. It is not just pie in the sky when we die, the way of travelling can be so enriching and fulfilling if we walk the paths in the presence of our Lord. As the hymn states,

*When we walk with the Lord in the light of his word  
What a glory he sheds on our way.*

So just like the travellers to Emmaus, our journey can be so enriched if we take every twist and turn, every high and low, every rough and smooth in his presence. The Emmaus travellers didn't see this at first, but afterwards they said to each other, "did not our hearts burn within us", and we too can burn with a holy fire in the presence of our Lord – the ultimate travelling companion

And just like Dorothy and Thomas, we too can grow, and become strong and achieve more than we ever imagined.

All of these things that we have just mentioned not only apply to us as individuals, but also to our church life.

Here at St Ives Uniting we too are on a journey and we are on the threshold of a brand new phase in our church life as we expectantly head out with our Supply Minister, Trevor Lunney. What the future holds will become clear and what twists and turns around the corner will also reveal themselves.

But, as we head off, I would like to make two final comments briefly.

**First:**

What lies ahead will not necessarily require us ditching all that is precious to us in our church life. We have been richly blessed by God and there is much in our church to truly celebrate. Our friendly, close and supportive fellowship with each other, the skills and talents we have within our Church family, our proud history, our spiritual and moving times when we have shared in special services, our memorable times when we have reached out into our community with our garage sales (with all their camaraderie) and concerts. There have been times in our past church life when we have felt God very close to us! These precious things and moments we must preserve.

**Second:**

Yet having said all of this we must also realise that we will need to change and take on new ventures. God says in Revelation “Behold I make all things new” and we must be willing to allow God to come into our lives to renew and refresh us. Even though we are not as young as we used to be, feel tired at times and not ready for any revolutions, we can pray for God’s Holy Spirit to come into our lives and in a process of gradual evolution and growth;

- Maybe as we grow, we will be able to explore some new and exciting paths
- Maybe, as we grow, we can discover that we still have much to offer – financial support, wisdom, ideas and encouragement.
- Maybe, as we grow, we will find more people able to take over the baton as we become older and more restricted, but also more people to lead into new ventures.
- Maybe this should be our prayer!

My screensaver makes me dream of all the interesting and exciting pathways I could be walking, and I often get ensconced in that dream.

Maybe with God’s help we can walk some interesting and exciting paths into the future.

Amen.