

BETWEEN THE DREAMING AND THE COMING TRUE

Love must be Tough

You may not have heard of him – I hadn't until I read about him in a book. If you've not heard of him, then you won't have heard of his extraordinary achievement either. Truth is, John Wesley Powell, has been pretty much forgotten. But John Wesley Powell had a vision and he was determined to live what he dreamed.

Most people thought the journey was a ridiculous idea, most people thought the journey was simply far too dangerous. Most people thought John Wesley Powell would never survive such a journey. Most people, in truth, thought John Wesley Powell was nuts.

In 1869 there were many legends of those who had tried and failed to do so. Conventional wisdom had it that any expedition through the Grand Canyon on the Colorado river was doomed to failure. Truth is, in 1869, no-one had ever set out on an expedition through the Grand Canyon on the Colorado River and come out alive. Out of all the expeditions that had tried, there was not one survivor.

One army Lieutenant who had explored the Colorado on the south side of the Grand Canyon believed that the river was so powerful and treacherous that it should be left unvisited and undisturbed! But John Wesley Powell had a vision to take an expedition through the Grand Canyon on the Colorado River.

Most people thought he was mad - and not just because history was so obviously against him. Like many of his generation, John Wesley Powell fought in the American Civil War. During the war he was shot, the bullet striking his forearm. As a result of the injury, his arm had to be amputated. John Wesley Powell thought he could take an expedition down the Colorado River, through the Grand Canyon, something no-one had ever successfully done before – and he had only one arm!

On May 24th 1896 he and nine others stepped into their four small boats to attempt the 1,000-mile journey. On the river they encountered extraordinary obstacles; killer rapids, waterfalls, boulders the size of cabins to name but a few. On the journey they lost boats, critical foodstuffs and instruments needed for the journey. And yet – and yet – 100 days later John Wesley Powell

and five other men emerged in two boats having successfully navigated their way through the canyon. They were all suffering from exposure and near starvation, but they had made it!

Of the other four men: one gave up and went home; the other three left the expedition only to be killed by native Indians. It was, in truth, an extraordinary journey – but six men chose to stay the course. Between the dreaming and the coming true, the journey was dangerous, exacting, exhausting and pushed them to the limit, but they stayed the course.

We live between the dreaming and the coming true. As we were reminded last week, we are on a journey and I'm sure we already know, the journey we are on can be dangerous, exciting, exhausting and can push us to the limit. We are on the journey of faith. Somebody once said; 'It's not so important how you start the journey of faith, what's important is how you finish it.'

So, let me ask you a question: How are you doing? How are you doing on your journey of faith? How are you doing as you live between the dreaming and the coming true?

Friends, we hold on to the 'coming true', don't we? We hold on to this vision of our anticipated future, don't we?

21 Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

⁶ He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. (Revelation 21 v 1-7)

Friends, isn't that our hope – isn't that what holds us even in the most difficult and challenging times? Hope is an extraordinarily powerful thing, and the vision of Revelation reminds us that hope ultimately is about what or who you hope in – and our hope is in the one who is trustworthy and true.

⁶The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

⁷"Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll. (Revelation 22 v 6-7)

That is the hope that holds us between the dreaming and the coming true. Some people like to say that the destination doesn't matter on a journey – it's all about the journey. For followers of Christ, that is not true. Our destination is to be with God, to be more fully alive than we have ever been. But here's the thing: the journey is still significant and important.

'Look, I am coming soon. Blessed are those who obey the words of the prophecy written in this book. (Revelation 22 v 7 – New Living Translation)

The journey matters – it matters to you and me and it matters to God. It is probably true that it's not how you start the journey of faith that's important, but rather how you finish. The truth is not everyone finishes well. You may recognize these names, the names of some who didn't finish well: Gideon, Eli, Saul, Solomon. There are others, of course, who did finish well; Abraham, Job, Daniel, Paul, Peter.

We know, you know, the journey of faith can be tough. Living between the dreaming and the coming true can be challenging, heart breaking, sometimes cruel, but sometimes full of joy and wonder.

Eugene Peterson suggests that one of the biggest challenges to the journey of faith in our day, is that we live in a culture of 'instant.' We have become people who want everything now. We have become a people who no longer really want to wait for anything. We have become a people who want everything on demand – from films & TV to shopping, holidays, fame and fortune. And he wonders about the effect that has on our journey of faith, as we live between the dreaming and the coming true.

We are attracted to the celebrity culture, the latest thing, the big-name speaker, the big crowd. We want to feel good. We live in a culture that encourages us to think anything worthwhile can be acquired at once. We live in a culture that encourages us to believe that if something can be done, it can be done immediately.

And, suggests Eugene Peterson, we think the same way about the journey of faith. Many people start the journey of faith, but many don't stay the course. Perhaps a challenge to our journey of faith is that we are encouraged to be tourists – picking out the bits we like, but never staying long enough to learn how to live in a place. Peterson suggest a much better way to understand the journey of faith is that of a pilgrim, someone who spends their life going somewhere. And on our journey of faith, we are not tourists, but disciples – those who learn how to live and live well between the dreaming and the coming true.

This familiar, but often misunderstood encounter, helps us to understand being a disciple.

At the Home of Martha and Mary

³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

⁴¹ "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10 v 38-42)

This story is sometimes understood to be about personality types, but it is far better understood as a story about a relationship, and it's a story about a relationship that starts with a decision – a decision we all make. Luke tells us that Mary chooses to sit at Jesus's feet. He uses a technical term here to make a very important point. He is not telling us Mary is sitting on the floor, he is telling us about the relationship between Mary and her rabbi. To sit at someone's feet is about being with them.

First Century Jesus had an expression that described how close the relationship was between rabbi and disciple; 'May you always be covered with the dust of your rabbi.' What mattered was not so much what the rabbi was actually doing, but being with them while they did it.

Here's a wonderful deep truth, as we live between the dreaming and the coming true, we can choose to sit at Jesus' feet.

A research team did an experiment to find out how well people could stay the course. Two groups of men were given the same task: a group of American football players and a group of FBI agents. Their task was simple – to run a mile along a path to a gate and back in 9 minutes.

This was an easy task for both groups of men. Both groups were told to watch out for the rattlesnakes on the path. As they waited to begin the run, each group was warned about the possibility of wild boar along the path and told they were at all costs to avoid any as they could be extremely dangerous. The truth was, there were no wild boar – just a researcher in the bushes pretending to be one.

Before they began they were reminded of the task: run to the gate and back in 9 minutes – you must complete the task. The footballers went first and all was going well until they saw movement in the bushes and heard what they thought was the sound of a wild boar. In a frenzied panic they turned and ran back down the path – thus not completing the task. As highly skilled and fit athletes they were devastated they failed to complete the task – to run 1 mile in 9 minutes.

The FBI agents set out along the path. When they thought they heard a wild boar and saw movement in the bushes, they put their training into practice, took a defensive position and waited. When no wild boar appeared, they continued the run – to the gate and back within 9 minutes successfully completing the task.

The researchers concluded that the difference between the two groups was that the FBI agents had been trained to expect the unexpected; they knew challenges would come and they were ready.

Friends, we live between the dreaming and the coming true, we are pilgrims who know where they are going, we are disciples who choose to sit at the feet of the rabbi. We are not looking for an instant fix or a quick way out. We

know that the journey of faith will be tough and challenging, sometimes tragic yet sometimes filled with joy, and in all that, we choose to love without limit.

We also know that we need help on our journey, and we are those who choose to learn from others who have gone before... those who know what its like to live the journey of faith, of living between the dreaming and the coming true. The people of Israel have left for us the Psalms of Ascent (120-134). The Psalms of Ascent remind us that on our journey of faith love must be tough for the journey is challenging.

William Faulkner described the Psalms of Ascent, not as monumental but footprints, for a monument only says: At least I got this far! While a footprint says: This is where I moved again.¹

So, friends, as we seek to love without limits on our journey of faith, let's learn from those who have gone before us. Let us be those who live well, love greatly and stay the course, however hard or easy our journey turns out to be.

Preached and Live Streamed at Crawley Baptist Church, on Sunday 16th January 2022, by Rev. Ian Phillips.

¹ Peterson, E., *"A Long Obedience in the Same Direction,"* Inter Varsity Press, 2021 ed. Page 16