

I've always had a special fondness for the Cheshire Cat in "Alice in Wonderland". Not so much the cartoon, but in the book. When I was a kid, his lines sounded like gibberish to me, but as I got older, I started to see the wisdom there, not unlike my journey with Scripture from childhood to now.

At one point Alice and the cat have this little exchange.

Alice: "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

The Cheshire Cat: That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.

Alice: I don't much care where.

The Cheshire Cat: Then it doesn't much matter which way you go.

Alice: ...So long as I get somewhere.

The Cheshire Cat: Oh, you're sure to do that, if only you walk long enough."

Where do you want to go? That is an important question, and one with a lot of different answers depending on the context, if you were being asked about lunch spots, vacation destinations, wedding venues, or your goal in life. And I'd love to know your answers to all of these questions, but for now, let's focus on life in general.

From the time we're very small, it seems like there's always somewhere to get to. First we learn to walk and talk and then to go to school. From there, we're supposed to pick where we want to go in our career. That might add on some destinations, like grad school or internships. Then there's all the other places we want to get to. Maybe that's marriage and children, or a house, or a new car. Even when we have enough, we always seem to be heading toward somewhere else. Maybe a bigger house, or another car, or a vacation home. We're always trying to get somewhere, and we'd like to get there fast with minimal inconvenience.

Peter also had somewhere he wanted to get to. God had long promised that the Messiah would come and save God's people, and Peter by the grace of God, has come to believe and know that Jesus is this long-awaited Messiah. The problem is that where Peter wants to go and where Jesus wants to go are very different places.

Peter has lived his life under the Roman occupation. His land, God's promised land, is occupied. The glory days of old, of the throne of the great King David and wise and wealthy Solomon, are long gone. In many ways, the people have lost control and self-determination. If they begin to

threaten the peace of Rome, they could even be killed. And so Peter looks back through that great and glorious history, and that's where he wants to get to; an Israel that is strong and powerful again, free from the Romans, with Jesus on the throne, a big and probably ever expanding palace and extravagant temple.

But Jesus wants to go somewhere else. Jesus will indeed save the people, but through a different kind of glory, a glory that is suffering transformed. Jesus will have no earthly throne, his sights are set on far more than Israel, and not one temple stone will be left on another.

Peter has feelings about this. Perhaps he is angry, disappointed, frightened, anxious, all of the above and maybe more. He tries to course correct Jesus, but Jesus hits the heart of the problem. Peter's priorities are not in line with God's. Peter is looking at earthly things, God is concerned with eternal things. Jesus didn't come to save the temple or build a palace, he came to save God's people from sin and death and Satan.

But we can't be too hard on Peter, because we have the same tendency. Far too often where we want to go is someplace familiar, comfortable, and easy. And where we want to go is different from where God wants us to go. The things we are prioritizing are different than God's priorities.

We live in a culture where church attendance is steadily declining for most main stream denominations. This brings a host of problems to our ever-shrinking churches. Tired and over worked volunteers, dwindling budgets, and a lack of resources to do the things we want to do for our communities and neighbors. We definitely have somewhere we want to get to. For some, it is back to the packed Sunday school classrooms of year ago, when church was as much a part of life as going to work. It was simply what you did. Or how about vacation bible schools with dozens of children? Or pews being nicely full on Sunday mornings. Much like Peter, we're wanting the familiar, the comfortable, the easy, the glory days of old.

But that may not be where God wants us to go. God promised to save us, and God did, but it wasn't familiar, or comfortable, or easy. It was glorious in the end, but that glory came through a time of great suffering first, a time of grief and uncertainty before the joy of Easter morning.

God always saves, but sometimes, maybe even often times, that salvation doesn't look like what we expect. The long awaited Messiah was a poor craftsman, not a gold drenched earthly king.

In this time of difficult realities and difficult choices for our churches, we may have been crying out for God to save us. And God will. God always saves, but the destination chooses the road, and the destination may not be what we thought it would be. The road is probably going to be unfamiliar, and uncomfortable at times. Some of our friends may even decide that a destination of "anywhere but here" is good enough and continue on their journey alone. But God sees things differently than we can, and calls us to set our eyes on the things of heaven, on the things of the gospel, on the things of this strange and wondrous call to be a disciple of Christ. God doesn't measure success by buildings and budgets, by programs and attendance. God would trade any and all of our buildings if it meant another of God's beloved children would hear and believe the gospel, of that I have no doubt.

But don't be afraid. We don't yet know where we're going, but God does, and God's destination will be the right one. Yes, the road might get a little bumpy, but God will walk every bit of it with us, even the bumpy parts, even the uncomfortable parts. God will be there when we grumble and complain, when we're saddened or angry, leading us exactly where God wants us to be. All we have to do is walk in faith, keeping our eyes on heavenly things. Don't look back, that way is gone. Don't look side to side, each has their own journey. Look to God and keep your eyes there, and surely we will walk before the Lord in the land of living.

Rev. Kate Mauch  
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