

#8 – STEPPING TOWARDS A NEW NORMAL: OR, WOULD YOU RATHER GO BACK TO EGYPT? (Bill Cahusac)

- Where have you seen God at work in your life this week? (Share any brief examples and encouragements).
- Was there anything from Sunday's message which you found particularly inspiring or challenging?
- Was there anything else you particularly noticed?

Numbers 13:26-14:9 (NIVUK)

They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. They gave Moses this account: 'We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan.' Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, 'We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.' But the men who had gone up with him said, 'We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are.' And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, 'The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.'

That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, 'If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?' And they said to each other, 'We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.' Then Moses and Aaron fell face down in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there. Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes and said to the entire Israelite assembly, 'The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them.'

Isaiah 46:9 says, "Remember the former things, those of long ago. I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me." But, on the other hand, **Isaiah 43:18-19** says, "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!". What, then, should we do?

- What are the 'former things' that it is good to remember? (Notice the second half of Isaiah 46:9)
- Looking back, what are you thankful for?
- How and why should we be remembering our own past stories?
- How do we, as Bill put it, 'Tell the story as it was, not as we would have liked it to be'?
- In 1965 (and appropriately it was on their album, 'Help') the Beatles recorded perhaps the most heart-wrenchingly nostalgic lyric of their generation: "Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away. Now it looks as though they're here to stay. Oh, I believe in yesterday". Many of us tend to look back at the past with a certain amount of wistful yearning. In our memories, we knock off many of the rough edges. But when does looking back become dangerous to health?
- What do you miss from life before COVID? (Or are your memories of 'Egypt' rose-tinted?)
- What are you missing from lockdown? (Or are those memories of 'the wilderness' also rose-tinted?)
- Do you secretly hope that your lateral flow test will turn out to be positive just so you can have the peace and quiet of self-isolating for another 10 days without having to face the world?

The Israelites were afraid to believe God's promises. They were tired, overwhelmed by the trauma of the wilderness, besides, the one good thing about being a slave is that you know what you will be doing every day and you know where the next meal is coming from. Then, in the wilderness, God had fed them on manna every day. The trouble with the future was that it looked dangerous and unpredictable. The land may have promised milk and honey, but someone else was still in control of the cows and the bees.

- What makes you apprehensive about the future right now?
- What 'land' lies ahead of you to 'go up and take possession of'?
- What is the 'fruit of the land' that you can see as God's possibility for you to enjoy?
- Who, or what, are the giants in your way?