

LENT 2024

JOURNEY to FREEDOM

SUNDAY 10TH MARCH

READ: Exodus 13:17-22

'The Lord went in front of them'

Exodus 13:21

I love maps. I can spend hours pouring over them. I love the details; I love to imagine being there, taking in the surroundings. The people of God didn't have a map for their exodus wanderings. At times they must have wished they had. They had something better, they had God Himself as their personal SatNav.

I can't imagine what it must have felt like for the people of Israel as they journeyed through the wilderness to the Promised Land. They were obviously tired, at times frustrated by lack of progress, and so the promise made by God to go before them by means of a pillar of cloud and of fire must have been a source of encouragement.

The comparison of the exodus journey and our own life pilgrimage is an obvious one to make and it shows two things:

First, it showed God's gentle leading. He knew their weaknesses, and, not wanting His people to be discouraged, God guides them on a route that avoids confrontation with the fierce warring peoples that were the Philistines. They head south-east towards the Red Sea rather than taking a more direct and perilous route. God too guides us on journeys that can seem circuitous, but are intended for our own protection, and He does so with gentleness.

Second, it showed God's continual presence. The Israelites were protected by His presence, sheltering them and coming between them and their enemies. It's a tremendous source of blessing and comfort to know that God is with us. As the Psalmist says, 'Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me' (Psalm 23:4). We have no cloud today, but God graciously leads us by His Holy Spirit. He goes ahead of us and so we have no need to fear.

'Lord, I would clasp thy hand in mine
Nor ever murmur nor repine;
Content whatever lot I see,
Since 'tis my God that leadeth me.

He leadeth me! He leadeth me!
By his own hand he leadeth me;
His faithful follower I would be,
For by his hand he leadeth me.'

'He Leadeth Me' by J. H. Gilmore

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