

**Sermon preached at the Church of the Holy Trinity, Philadelphia
on Sunday July 15th 2007 by the Reverend Alan Neale
“The Longest Journey”**

What is the longest, single journey you have ever made? It does not matter how long the journey took... what is your longest journey?

In his “Shadow of the Silk Road”, Colin Thubron (described by the Times’ Book Review as ‘the dean of British travel writers), Colin Thubron chronicles his 7,000-mile journey in 2003 and 2004 from Xian, China to the Turkish coastal city of Antioch (a journey begun, by the way, when he was about to turn 64).

So Mr. Thurbron would definitely have a ready and impressive answer to my question.

But ask Chief Joseph who lived in Oregon in the late nineteenth century and you hear another answer... really worthy of the title “and now for something completely different”. Chief Joseph once said, “The longest journey you will ever make in your life... is from your mind to your heart”.

You surely have had the experience when with all your persuasive and sincere powers you have tried to explain something to a friend (perhaps even to your partner)... silence follows and then comes the feared response, “Oh, I hear you!”. At that point everything in you wants to cry out, “No you don’t, no you don’t”. You have a sense, deep down, that that “hearing” is transient and will make no impact.

“The longest journey you will ever make in your life... is from your mind to your heart”.

Friends, this is truly the most important journey... it prepares us for eternity, it enables us to live happy, joyous and free lives. When someone says to us, “I love you”... we want them to love us with their heart as well as their mind; when someone says to us “I love you”... we want, we need, we yearn to believe that not only with our minds but also with our hearts. Probably most therapeutic problems would be eased, if not solved, if we deeply believed that by God we were loved, we were forgiven, and we had a special purpose.

So, if this is so important what is it that blocks this journey? This is not a rhetorical question... (at this point the following responses

came from the congregation... “Fear” “Pride” “Lack of Forgiveness”...).

Amos, our reluctant prophet (you can't help but like him)... Amos knew what it was to make a journey... he journeyed from Bethel to Judah; he journeyed in his trade from “a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees” to a bold, outspoken prophet for the Lord. But the longest journey he ever made was from mind to heart... he sees what everyone else sees, a commonplace thing where construction and rebuilding is taking place... he sees a plumb line with his mind but then with his heart he sees deeply and understands profoundly.

The priest and the Levite (in the parable of the Good Samaritan), these two characters are definitely engaged in a journey... one from Jerusalem to Jericho. A journey that could be dangerous, a journey that was invariably arduous. But this sadly was the only journey they were taking... they knew the commandments, they knew the laws about love and care for the stranger and the oppressed but all that information had simply established residence in their minds and had moved, it seems, not an inch towards their hearts... to make them sensitive, feeling, committed, active people for God.

But then look at the Samaritan – here is a man on the same journey physically but worlds apart in the journey he makes from mind to heart. A man convinced of and shaped by a commitment to love and care for those in need.

“The longest journey you will ever make in your life... is from your mind to your heart”.

It is surely no wonder then that St. Paul makes it his prayer for the Colossian Christians that they not only understand with their minds (be “filled with a knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and understanding”) but that this be experience in a deep, profound, “spiritual” way.

Billy Bray was often called the “dancing evangelist”. He was born towards the end of the nineteenth century in a rough mining town in Cornwall, England. For many years he lived a life of drunkenness and debauchery and then, one day, it all changed... he read a Christian pamphlet and at 3am he knelt by his bed, surrendered his life to God and asked for the salvation of his soul. At that moment the journey had been made from mind to heart... he not only knew about God's love, he knew God's love; not only about grace and

forgiveness and hope... he knew God's grace, forgiveness and hope.

Not surprisingly what he had experienced himself, he wanted others to experience for themselves... he consistently traveled to preach the Gospel and work for the conversion of mind but especially of heart. One day he worshipped in a Methodist church and during the pastor's sermon, Billy Bray realized a change had come over the preacher... he stood up in the congregation and shouted, "Hallelujah, the pastor's been converted... the pastor's been converted".

Friends, the experience of Billy Bray... the experience of that Methodist pastor... that experience is for us today.

Today, we are called not only to look at and read the words of our liturgy... but to allow them by the power of the Holy Spirit to invade our very being and change us.

Today, we are called not only to look at, handle, receive bread and wine... but to allow them to be for us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, carriers of divine life to deep within our very being.

Friends, I want to make this journey but I do not want to, I do not need to, make this journey alone.

It is, it will be, costly... Amos suffered personal injury, calumny, frustration; the Samaritan expended much of his time and much of his possessions.

It will be costly... open-heart surgery, invasive surgery is never without its cost but without it the patient may die or, at best, live a life half-fulfilled.

But the journey is worth it... it has about it the ring, the atmosphere, the flavour, the taste the smell of eternity - in its light all else seems shallow, unsatisfying, mundane.

At today's service the choir will the Motet "God be in my head" - the words of this piece are from the "Sarum Primer," a collection of divine prayers and worship services in the English Church that was developed from the early thirteenth century.

God be in my head, and in my understanding;

God be in mine eyes, and in my looking;
God be in my mouth, and in my speaking;
God be in my heart, and in my thinking;
(and because we make these prayers and God answers them, we
may pray with total serenity...)
God be at mine end, and at my departing.

Please, let this be our simple prayer for today and this week... God
be in my head, God be in my heart... come in, take up residence
and reign!

AMEN

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