

7th May 2006 Easter 4 B

Rebecca Newland

Readings:

- Isaiah 30:18-21
- Psalm 19:1-6
- 1Corinthians 15:1-8
- John 14:6-14

Text of readings is available at <http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/lectionary/BEaster/bEaster3.htm> St Philip's Day/Easter 4B: Isaiah 30:18-21, Psalm 19:1-6, 1 Cor 15:1-8, John 14:6-14

Look around and God will show you the way

*Lord may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you now and always.
Amen*

(*Nadgee and heath country*) David and I like to go bush walking. In fact we like anything that can get us out into the wide-open spaces. In the Philippines we spent as much time as we could walking from place to place and we got to walk in some truly spectacular country. Here in Australia one of our favourite places to walk is the Nadgee wilderness on the south coast. It is truly beautiful. We went there last September for 10 days walking and camping. There was this one moment — a marital moment — when we were in disagreement about which way to go. We were trying to get down a cliff to the ocean but had to cut through low scrub. Now the heath country at Nadgee is beautiful until you get up close and have to walk in it. Then it is full of spiky leaves and branches. It is country only fit for wallabies and wombats to get around in. Anyway we were hot, exhausted, fed up and couldn't decide which way to go — well David could decide and I was convinced he was wrong.

Nothing was going right until we stopped, looked about, took some deep breaths and made a decision that made perfect sense to both of us — we gave up trying to make our way down the cliff and we went straight back to the well worn track.

(Caving) I have another tale of being lost in the wilderness but this one was actually terrifying rather than frustrating. When I was about 18 I went caving with a group of friends at Murrarundi caves in the Hunter Valley. We kitted up and headed underground. At some point in the crawling about in the dark we got lost. Totally lost. It was without a doubt one of the most terrifying things that has ever happened to me. We crawled here and there, our panic rising, as we couldn't make out which way to go. Eventually exhausted and very frightened we just sat still. We waited. We were numb but still breathing. I lay back and looked up at the roof of the rock tunnel and shone my fading torch above me. There on the roof was an arrow painted in big white brushstrokes.

(The church) All this rushing about, losing our way and making a mess of it seems to resonate with me when you think what the church is sometimes like. When I say church I mean any church not necessarily St. Philip's. Churches can be the most wonderful places — full of love and community. In fact I love the Christian church but I sometimes I look at what happens in it and feel totally perplexed. St. Philip and his band of fellow apostles would have had no idea what churches would be like in this day and age. As they were wandering about the Middle East preaching the good news, casting out evil spirits and healing the afflicted in the name of Jesus Christ, they would have been totally oblivious to the real future of the church. The church with its schisms, arguments, confusion, the church with its academia, technology and rituals and the church with its struggle to proclaim the gospel in an ever increasing secularized world. The church strives to find its way in a landscape that is often hostile and difficult. Or it takes off in directions that are dubious at the best and downright evil at the worst.

(Us) We are thinking about the church today — in fact this little church in O'Connor, Canberra. On this day of celebrating St. Philip and this community it is a good

time to think about who we are and where we are going. Because we are going somewhere, even if it might feel as if we are not ... we are going somewhere.

(St. Philip's example & Jesus' answer) St. Philip though kept things pretty simple. I don't think Philip tried to complicate matters like Andrew, he didn't try to prove how devoted he was like Peter by promising the impossible, he didn't spend time worrying about what others were doing like Martha, he didn't require rock hard proof like Thomas. Philip followed. When Jesus called Philip simply followed. But he did ask questions — questions that were about getting clarity and understanding, questions that were about helping him to follow even more faithfully. Like his question today "Show us the father and we will be satisfied", Jesus appears a little exasperated by Philip's question and tells his listeners that if they know him then they automatically know God. When I was talking last week about knowing Jesus this is the other part of the equation — if you know Jesus then you know God.

(The journey in John's gospel) In John's gospel Jesus is obviously more than just a holy man and a great religious teacher. In this gospel Jesus is the channel, the way, to a whole new life a life that takes the believer into intimate relationship with the divine. John lays out a map that takes the believer from darkness to light, from falsehood to truth and from death to life. In this long discussion with the disciples Jesus takes his listeners on this journey and tries to open their eyes to the way creation operates from God's perspective.

(Philip the evangelist) St. Philip's eyes were eventually opened to see things from the perspective of God and to live that out in word and deed. In the book of Acts Philip becomes a courageous preacher and teacher. Christians were persecuted relentlessly in the very early days and Philip along with the other apostles sticks faithfully to the path laid down by Jesus. It is a path we are asked to follow as well and our journey is fraught with dangers also.

(Keep it simple — Isaiah) We can make the journey very complex or sit back complacently and do nothing. However if we read scripture carefully it all becomes

pretty simple. I heard a saying once that said "If it is complex it is from man, if it is simple it is from God". There is a beautifully simple phrase that Isaiah gives in today's reading. Isaiah is reassuring his listeners that God is waiting to be gracious to them; God is waiting to answer their cry. Isaiah writes "And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying is the way, walk in it'.

(Jesus the way) Like in my story of getting lost, losing the way or coming up against impassable obstacles there is a way forward. It involves stopping, looking and listening. Listening for the word of God that says "This is the way, walk in it". The way God gives us is Jesus Christ. Scripture encourages us to listen for the word of God that points to Jesus Christ. Once we have found that path then the decisions become clear, the difficulties begin to diminish, the fears decrease and the possibilities just begin to jump out at us. Like the large white arrows on the roof of the cave the answer is just there.

(The graciousness of God and seeing clearly) God is waiting to be gracious to us. God is waiting to show us the way. God waits and we have only to pay attention, listen and look. Jesus would often upbraid his listeners for being unable to perceive things as they really were. Whether we see the path clearly has nothing to do with whether it is there or not and everything to do with whether we are using our eyes and ears.

(Doing it) So slow down, look around, and listen for the word of God — the word of God that will show us the way of Jesus Christ. That way will lead us into life and truth. If you are not sure how to slow down and listen then just start with breathing more deeply and slowly — try that for a week or so!

(Results) When we take the path of Jesus Christ we can become a community that lives out its God given potential. We can make the decisions that bring new life and hope. We can grow in our understanding of Gods justice and mercy. We can grow in our faith and in our love for each other.

(Closing prayer) As we share in communion, the food for the journey, may Philip and all the saints be our

companions and may Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life, be ever more present and real to us.

Amen