

Series: On Purpose

February 5, 2017

Title: Face to Face

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Text: 1 Corinthians 13:8-13

The One Constant

20 years on the high seas:

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Sometime in 1996 a 45 year old investment manager named Mario Salcedo boarded Royal Caribbean's *Voyager of the Seas* in search of a new direction for his life. Call it the classic "mid-life moment." His vision: to "start a new chapter in my life traveling around the world."

That new chapter turned into 20 years of *non-stop* cruising aboard the ships of Royal Caribbean. To date, he has spent over 6000 nights on their cruise ships, or around 850 cruises. To the captains and crew he has become a beloved fixture; they've nicknamed him "Super Mario."

He runs his investment business from deck 11 of Royal Caribbean's *Navigator of the Seas*. He schedules trips some 150 bookings ahead, so that he can keep the same cabin. All told, he only logs 15 days or so on land every year – usually for doctor's appointments or making flights between ports.

The only downside for this full-time voyager of the high seas:

"I've lost my land legs, so when I'm swaying so much I can't walk in a straight line." (www.cntraveler.com/stories/2016-05-06)

They say that "Life is a journey." Well, Super Mario has turned the last twenty years of his life into 850 journeys, with no end in sight!

New Exodus Journey:

Like Super Mario, when we make the decision to follow Jesus, we embark on a life-long journey. The big difference is that is a journey with a sure and certain *destination*. It is not simply a celebration of traveling around, racking up the number of cruises. It is not simply an endless round of dockings and

departures, interspersed with time at sea. It is the journey from the old creation to God's New Creation.

Our journey is modeled after the Exodus journey that the people of Israel took when God brought them out of slavery and death to travel to the Promised Land, a land "flowing with milk and honey." But while it was a journey with a fixed destination, it was not a quick journey by any means. For just about everyone on the trip, it meant a lifetime of living in the "in between space" that was no longer Egypt but was not yet the Promised Land.

Like the ancient people of Israel, we are on a life-long journey. Our journey is from the realm of sin and death into God's New Creation. As Paul writes to the Philippian Christians:

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Philippians 3:20-21 Phillips

But we are citizens of Heaven; our outlook goes beyond this world to the hopeful expectation of the savior who will come from Heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will re-make these wretched bodies of ours to resemble his own glorious body, by that power of his which makes him the master of everything that is.

Meanwhile, like Super Mario, we're on the move.

The one Constant:

Super Mario is *unlike* virtually every other passenger aboard a Royal Caribbean liner. While the other 3000 passengers are there to *get away from it all*, Super Mario isn't getting away from anything: the voyage *is his life*. He is fulfilling a deeply held vision of who he is and wants to be.

On our life journey, we too need to be focused on the real reason for the journey. We need to be living as those who have left the old life behind and are *already* living the new life in Christ.

So what is the *one constant* that energizes every step of our New Exodus journey? What is it that brings us ever closer to Paul's vision of our "wretched bodies" remade and resurrected to be like Jesus?

Paul's answer:

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1 Corinthians 13:8a NIV

Love never fails.

The power that sustains the world and is at the heart of its renewal is God's almighty Love. It is the one word that defines God for us. It is the *one constant* in the long, often confusing journey of our lives.

The Traveler's Gifts**Exodus Gifts:**

Traveling requires special provisions, special gifts. Every moment a cruise ship is at sea, a vast array of computers and satellites provide the bridge with up to date navigational information. Below decks the generators provide power at sea. Every meal, every beverage, every snack comes from the ship's stores. There are no supermarkets in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

Israel's Exodus journey required special gifts. Think of just how terrifying it must have been to go from the most advanced civilization in the ancient world out into a howling waste! Water sources were few and far between. Food was non-existent. Bandits watched your every move. Snakes and scorpions lurked at every turn.

In the face of these obstacles God provided what you might think of as "travelers' gifts." He provided water from the rock face. He provided manna, "bread from heaven" that appeared on the ground each morning. He brought the migrating quail to land in the Israelites' camp. When poisonous snakes attacked the Israelites, He healed their snakebites.

But an interesting thing happened at the end of the journey. We are told in no uncertain terms that the Travelers' Gifts stopped happening. When Israel crossed the Jordan River and entered Canaan – the Promised Land – the manna stopped appearing:

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Joshua 5:11-12 NIV

The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain.

The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate the produce of Canaan.

The supernatural gifts of the Exodus journey were no longer necessary. They had reached the Promised Land.

New Exodus gifts:

Paul explains that the very same is true in our New Exodus journey from the land of sin and death to God's New Creation:

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1 Corinthians 13:8b-10 NIV

But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are supernatural manifestations of God Himself right in the middle of our Exodus journey. They are absolutely *indispensable* to that journey. Without the guiding of the Holy Spirit, we will just wander around aimlessly – like a ship at sea without compass or GPS. Just as the cloud was God's supernatural manifestation to Israel, to lead them through the wilderness, the Holy Spirit, in various ways, leads us through on our way to God's New Creation.

But the day will come when we finish the journey. And when that day comes, the spiritual gifts that were so necessary for the journey will no longer be needed.

Growing up in Christ:

Mark Twain is said to have remarked:

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"When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years."

I guess not much has changed since Mark Twain's time.

Paul would have understood Twain's insight. He goes on to write:

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1 Corinthians 13:11 NIV

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.

Things that seem totally important in the here-and-now will one day be left behind. We're destined for something beyond our wildest imaginations, something that only the Father in Heaven can conceive and make happen. But to get there will mean eventually leaving our spiritual infancy behind.

Just as the spiritual gifts are not the "main thing," but are an essential part of the journey, so too, our ways of seeing the world in the present time are not the end of the story.

Face to Face

As in a mirror:

So what is the final goal of this journey? What does it mean to finally be "all grown up"? To answer these questions, Paul gives us one more metaphor: the looking glass.

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1 Corinthians 13:12 NIV

For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror: then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

In the middle of the Exodus story there is a little passage where God talks about the very special relationship He has with Moses:

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Numbers 12:6-8b NIV

"When there is a prophet among you, I the LORD, reveal myself to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams.

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"But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD."

In the Greek translation of this passage, the word "riddles" is translated: "enigmas." The word referred to something that was indistinct or indirect. Paul uses this same word when he says that in the present time we see a *reflection* as in a mirror. What we see is an "enigma," a fuzzy, indistinct vision of a greater reality.

Again, here are words for our own Exodus journey. Our best perceptions of God and His plan are enigmas in comparison to the future reality we will one day know and experience.

Face to face:

Think of what it is like to be separated from a loved one with no communication except the occasional phone call or video chat. As wonderful as each of those encounters may be, they are nothing like running down the concourse after your long fight home and into the arms of your beloved!

That's what Paul means when he says that "then we shall see face to face." Then we will finally "know fully" what God has known about us all along.

The destination of our New Exodus journey is not a place. It is a Person – the One Person our souls have longed for all our lives. Only then will we have reached maturity. Only then will we be able to throw away the mirrors of this world. As John writes:

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1 John 3:2 NIV

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

The greatest of these:

One thing sums up what it means to finally see Him face to face.

That one thing is what Paul calls the greatest of all the things that will sustain us in our faith journey and still be there when it is over:

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1 Corinthians 13:13 NIV

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Faith assures me that God is leading me on this improbable wilderness journey. Hope reminds me of the ultimate destination. But in that instant when we are finally face to face with our Lord and our God, the only thing we will know is Love.

LIFE Group Lesson for “Face to Face”

Ice Breaker:

- Name one thing about your life right now that would have been completely unexpected or surprising to you as a 21 year old.

From A to Z:

- We saw last week that God makes Himself known to us through His love for us.
 - He meets us at the “bottom of the U.”
 - Love alone can undo the terrible power of hate and fear.
 - Love doesn’t demand payment; it isn’t earned.
 - Love alone breaks the downward spiral into chaos and death.
 - This is why Paul insists that the spiritual gifts and acts of devotion are nothing without Love.
- In the remainder of 1 Corinthians 13, the “Love Chapter,” Paul explains that Love, and Love alone, is the driving force of our New Exodus journey into God’s New Creation.
 - The second part of the chapter includes verses 8-13.
 - Notice that this section begins and ends with the same word: Love.
 - This is Paul’s way of saying that Love is the A-Z of our new life in Christ. In Revelation we read that God is the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega. Likewise, Love encompasses every aspect of God’s New Creation. It *is* the mark of His presence.

Moving forward in our journey:

- Paul pushes us forward in these verses:
 - Gifts are for now; one day they will cease, be stilled, pass away.
 - Our partial understanding of God will be replaced by complete understanding.
 - When we mature from childhood to adulthood, we leave childish things and childish ways behind. The same will be true when we fully enter into God’s presence in the New Creation.
- Think about the thing you shared a few moments ago:
 - You shared about something in your present life that you would never have expected or imagined when you were 21.

- Think how more amazing it will be to stand in God's presence on the other side of this life, on the other side of death itself! Like the song says, "I can only imagine..."
- Paul says that three things outlast this life journey:
 - *1 Corinthians 13:13 NIV*
 - *And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*
 - "Faith" includes "faithfulness" – the faithfulness of God and our faithfulness to Him. God will be faithful in the New Creation, and so will we!
 - "Hope" describes what we long for now, and what we will experience then.
 - "Love" is the greatest of the three: Love is the driving force that makes the journey happen.

Face to Face:

- This is why Paul's picture of looking in a mirror is so powerful.
 - For now, a dim perception of God is the best we have.
 - But one day it will be replaced by a face to face encounter.
- Think of what it's like to FaceTime or Skype a loved one:
 - The slightly fuzzy image on your phone is way better than just a voice.
 - But it will never be as good as an embrace.
 - And that is where the journey ends.

Share and Pray:

- Take some time to share prayer requests and pray for each other.