

Notes from a churchwarden - Jesus and the Orange Peel

A group of us had set off walking from Marsden over Black Hill in the Pennines. The weather was poor and we were walking in mist and drizzly rain. Black Hill is a large featureless lump and is difficult to navigate, even in good weather. There is a line of spaced cairns to the summit, if you can find them amongst the peat hags and open moorland. Today we could not see the cairns and relied on a compass bearing. "We follow a bearing of 150" said Maurice, our leader. He checked his compass and set off walking. On the ground we passed someone's discarded orange peel. Nobody would normally have noticed it, if it hadn't been for the fact our heads were down, following our leader. The brightly coloured peel stood out amongst the dark peat, and in the mist there was nothing else to see.

We trudged on. Approximately a half hour to forty five minutes later a voice cried out. "We've walked in a circle". "No we haven't" said our leader. "Yes we have" said the first voice "There's that orange peel we passed before". Sure enough, by our feet was the same bit of orange peel that we'd noticed earlier. "How can that be. You were checking the compass bearing weren't you, Maurice?" Maurice confessed that after taking the initial bearing he hadn't continued to check the direction, with the result that as people tend to have one leg stronger than the other, there is a tendency to veer slightly left or right depending on which leg is favoured. Normally this wouldn't matter, if you could see where you were going, but today we couldn't.

We took the bearing again, and this time kept checking the direction with the compass, and sure enough we were able to successfully navigate over the hill to Crowden.

Looking back on that experience, I began to think that life can be a bit like that. How many of us, I wonder find ourselves thinking we have made the correct decision, but unable to be sure of the consequences of our actions, only to find some time later, that we are right back where we started from. I know, from experience, that in my own case there have been times when I thought I had done the right thing and followed the correct path, only to find that things have come crashing down about my ears.

If we think of Matthew's gospel, Chapter 14, Jesus asks the disciples to go by boat across the lake. A storm blows up and Jesus walks on the water to calm the disciples. Peter jumps over the side to walk towards Jesus, but takes his eye off Jesus, and sees the storm, and starts to sink.

It is very easy in our Christian walk to look at the trials and troubles we, and others, are facing and forget to look to the Lord. We must not let our trials overwhelm us to the point where we take our eyes off Him. Had Peter kept his eyes on Jesus, the waves and the winds, large and strong, would still have been there, still as daunting, but in perspective. Peter does respond in the right way when he begins to sink – he calls out for help. Immediately recognizing what is happening, he does not try to save himself by swimming, but calls on the Lord to save him.

Looking back at the incident with the orange peel, perhaps the Lord was looking after us. I mean, what are the chances of walking in an almost perfect circle over moorland, to be brought back to a tiny bit of orange peel, from whence we could start again.

I know this story sounds impossible, but it is nevertheless true. So let Jesus be your map and compass. You will still face trials, but you will end up on the right path.

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