

The Road Less Traveled – July 13, 2018

As I write this there are literally hundreds of kids spread throughout our campus talking about Jesus. Vacation Bible School is in full swing, and 150 or so members of our faith family are spending their week sharing the Good News with the youngest in our community. Suffice to say it's a good week.

The theme for VBS this year is "Shipwrecked," and the overarching message is that *Jesus Rescues*. (For the record, the appropriate response to that truth is *Ahoy!* Just so you know.) And there is a wonderful irony to the week. As we were beginning the first evening session on Sunday, divers in Thailand were rescuing the first of twelve young soccer players, who along with their coach, spent more than two weeks trapped in a flooded cave. On June 23, The team's assistant coach led the boys about two and a half miles into the cave as part of a team ritual. Flash flooding trapped the group in the cave, and they finally found shelter on a narrow shelf of rock surrounded by water. Rescue divers finally discovered them July 2 more than three miles from the cave's entrance. It would take another eight days for the last of the boys and the assistant coach to be guided out of the cave.

Meanwhile, the world watched, waited and prayed. It is an incredible story of perseverance on the part of the hundreds of military and civilian workers from around the world who teamed up to rescue the group. And it's an incredible story of perseverance on the part of the trapped team and their coach, waiting patiently and reportedly keeping themselves in good spirits as their rescuers planned the best way to liberate them.

But mostly it's a story of hope. I mean, can you imagine the scene. After fleeing deeper into a cave trying to outrun flood waters that threatened to drown everyone, you finally find refuge on a cold, wet shelf of rock. The water laps at the lip of the shelf, and you know that any rain outside could cause the water to rise over the edge of the shelf. You're so deep in the cave you can't hear if it's raining outside. Not that it would matter anyway; there's nowhere for you to go.

Maybe you have a cell phone, but it's useless this far underground. You have no way of knowing if someone is looking for you or if they are even looking in the right place. Days go by. Night and day are the same. Nothing much changes in the damp darkness, except perhaps the water level on the edge of the shelf.

In that situation, what motivates you to go on? What keeps you from simply giving up? Some would say blind faith. But I disagree. What keeps you going is hope. And hope is different from blind faith. Blind faith is that faith that you turn to when you have nothing else. It's when you turn to God, praying that others are right, and God really is there. But hope is something entirely different. Hope is empirical. Hope is experiential. Hope is the living out of truth.

Hope is the conviction that God is with you despite all evidence to the contrary. Hope is the certainty that as long as God is with you, then all is not lost. Hope is the glimmer of light that pierces the most consuming darkness and assures you that there is a way, regardless of how narrow the passage.

I don't know for sure about the faith of the boys and their coach. Odds are they are Buddhist, as the vast majority of people in Thailand are. But I have a pretty good idea that they are people of faith. Because they clearly know something about hope. And hope doesn't come easily or naturally for us.

It's something you have to come to believe. I hope you see you on Sunday and experience the power of hope as our kids did this week.

See you Sunday.