

“Good Directions”

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*First Presbyterian Church
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I Samuel 23:1-14
I Thessalonians 3:6-13*

When the skipper of an Iceland trawler accidentally rammed Englishman Jim Hughes’s yacht, he caused \$30,000.00 worth of damage. Exactly a year and a day before, reported the London Times, the skipper, Eriker Olafsson, had hit the same boat causing \$40,000.00 in damage.

Now, what are the odds of this happening twice? Actually, pretty good, since Olafsson purposely steered toward Hughes to apologize for the previous year’s collision. He just got the directions wrong, again!

Which reminds me of my ongoing saga with my GPS (Global Positioning System) in my car. You know how I now get directions from point A to point B. It normally works quite well.

A few weeks ago I programmed it to take me from Wilkes-Barre to the Fire Dept. building in Wright Twp for a Graduation Celebration. It wanted me to get onto 81 South, but I knew (smart as I am) that 81 South was backed up with construction, so I ignored its early directions and went up the mountain via 309. By the way, I fumbled the GPS early on as I set it on its perch. Well, as I kept going up the mountain, it was relentless in telling me verbally to turn around. When in Mountaintop it wouldn’t stop – “turn around” – that’s all it knew to say! I was becoming a bit exasperated with the “giver of directions”!

I knew it had to be wrong!! I knew I81 was near and that by now I must be below my destination – but it would not recognize this reality! I did get onto I81 North and it said I had 12 miles to travel. I was not happy! Two miles later the Nuangola exit appeared – which I took, and a half mile later I arrived at the party.

I realized that when I fumbled with the GPS back in Wilkes-Barre, I apparently pressed a button that changed my destination from the fire hall to Wilkes-Barre itself. From the beginning it was sending me back to the beginning. It was only doing what it was told to do! From the GPS’s perspective, it was giving good directions. I hadn’t programmed it correctly. I was the problem. Go figure.

Directions. We take directions all the time, and sometimes we get them right, sometimes we get them wrong, sometimes they matter a little, sometimes they matter a lot!!

Where do you derive your bedrock directions for your life? Where do those fundamental, foundation directions for your life and the lives of your family come from? I trust they originate – from God, as understood, and revealed in Jesus Christ through our scriptures, tradition and human experiences.

We need good direction for our lives! There is no lacking of direction in this world. What is lacking is good direction. That good direction is to be found in seeking the transcendent the God of the scriptures, the incarnate Jesus Christ. It has been tried and it is true and trustworthy. Let’s take some direction from an ancient writing, and early, evolving case in our faith development.

Three thousand years ago David (before being King) was on the run – for King Saul knew he was a threat to his power (not a physical threat, but a political threat). Saul wanted David and his followers dead. When Saul zigged, David zagged – keeping one step ahead.

Life or Death.

David needed to get the right directions, and he needed to follow them.

At one point David isn't sure what direction to take. He requests that the priest Abiathar give him the sacred ēphod. Saul knows David's whereabouts and is planning his attack. David dons the ēphod. Getting direction!

What is this thing – ēphod? Here in I Samuel it is an important priestly garment, used to divine what direction a person and people should take. It was kind of an expensive sweater vest, made of threads “of blue and of purple, of scarlet and fine twined linen,” embroidered in gold thread. Two golden rings were sown onto it at the shoulders, where the breastplate was attached. On the breastplate were 12 precious jewels, representing the 12 tribes of Israel. And on the breastplate of the ēphod were the sacred oracle stones, the Urim and Thummim. These were believed to be divining stones, dice, lots – that God used to direct God's people.

So David inquires of the Lord – “Will Saul come here to destroy me?” (Throws the Urim and Thummim) “The dice” “Yes.” “Will we be betrayed?” (Throws the Urim and Thummim) “The dice” “Yes, indeed!” So David knows what direction to take. Off he and his men go! To safety.

In ancient, dare I say primitive time, this was a way God directed God's children, using the Ephod.

Ancient Assyrian, Babylonian and Egyptian literature have similar examples. We, you and me – we want to know what direction to take in our lives! Just as the ancients, we are seeking, looking for direction in our lives.

The throw of the dice, in ancient times meant something quite different than it does today. In ancient times it meant – divine direction – invested with authority.

From ancient times to today we are looking for direction! Good direction!

In David's time, dreams and prophetic speech were also ways God directed their lives. No mention of the ēphod after David. An evolving of understanding.

Prophetic speech came to the forefront! This wrapped together with a moral/ethical worldview of God, and how God's creation is to behave! No more throwing the dice, instead history, tradition, rationality, human experience; melded into prophetic speech, giving direction for life.

But, direction we need, we must have!!

Seeking God, through our scriptures, through prayer, through workshop.

Did you notice what was declared in I Thessalonians? Here is a given for Christians. “Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you...” Direct our way.

Where do you get your direction from? Mother, father, grandparents, teachers, ministers, friends, mentors... Where did they get their directions? Probably, most of them derived a major portion of their views, positions – of directions – from our Christian faith. I'm speaking of the Christian ethos – view of life, ethics, morals, worldview.

M friends, when confused about which direction to take, consult trusted family and friends, mentors, your pastor; but also get radical, go to the root, to the life and teaching of Jesus Christ!

This will give you the overall setting to help you take the right direction for your life! Good directions!

I mean this sincerely – there are many people you know who need good directions – you have them – direct them to our church – and we will offer them the directions that will renew their lives and the lives of their families!

It's up to you!

Amen.