

I would like to ask the congregation some questions, maybe they are rhetorical, but some may want to indicate an answer.

How many people used to watch the TV series Hawaii Five-O with Jack Lord?

How many people used to watch the TV series Magnum P I with Tom Selleck?

What about those series impressed you? What things do you remember that had an impact on you?

Well my son, Kyle, like many of you, was impacted by Magnum P I and the reruns of Hawaii Five-O. The colourful shirts that Tom Selleck wore, the red Ferrari, riding the surfboards, got him hooked on the life style that he saw on those TV programs and maybe just maybe the records Robin and I listened to, may also have had a little bit of an influence - the Beach Boys and Jan and Dean.

But like many early teens, Kyle didn't know where he was going!

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Barbara read from Deuteronomy this morning chapter 26 verses 1-11. Right now, I'm beginning at verse 5:

*A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. <sup>6</sup> When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, <sup>7</sup> we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. <sup>8</sup> The LORD brought us out of Egypt ...,*

The Lord brought the Israelites out of Egypt, but before they were brought to the promised land, they wandered in the desert. They did not know where they were going. They were totally dependent on God and for 40 years God was with them during the night as a pillar of flame and during the day, they followed a pillar of clouds in which God was present.

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Whenever we went shopping, in September, for back to school clothes, Kyle was always the one who chose the flowery shirts with the brightest colours. One Christmas, we may have encouraged him a little too much, when he got his first skateboard. That skateboard, the TV programs, and quite possibly the music he heard at home, all contributed to him getting the surfing bug. He really wanted to learn how to surf. But the chances of learning how to surf in Ontario, are pretty slim. But Kyle was a determined teenager and he began to research where there was good surf. He didn't know where he was going!

Throughout high school he seemed a little lost, he didn't have a focus. Try as much as we did, as the school did, he just didn't seem interested in much, except the idea of surfing. Since Lake Ontario didn't fit the bill, his research showed that there were many places in the world, where he could learn to surf. But he just didn't want to holiday in Hawaii, he didn't want to spend a week in Mexico, he wanted to spend more like a year learning this new skill. He didn't know where he was going!

But with a little more research, he discovered that he could teach English in Indonesia, surf on the weekends, and earn some money for living. He paid for a TEFL course and on Halloween 2000, Kyle flew to Indonesia, much to Robin's consternation. He didn't know where he was going!

He returned home the next year, we moved to BC, he returned to Indonesia for two shorter teaching gigs or maybe it was just for more cheap surfing. He didn't know where he was going!

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Do those last few words ring true in any way for you?

Did we know where we were going, say in January 2020? When we first began this amalgamation journey, did we know where we were going? I'm hoping everybody can say no, we didn't know exactly. It has been a wild ride, discussing amalgamation, working through the church's amalgamation document, spending time working through a vision and then approving both at congregational meetings.

We were all a little nervous earlier this week, wondering what would happen at the Presbytery meeting. We thought we had an excellent proposal, but we didn't know how other people would view it.

I've said many times, that when I make a decision, some people are happy, but not everyone is filled with that same joy, some become filled with sadness. There were some rumours being shared very quietly that our proposal might not receive 100% support at the Presbytery meeting. It made some of us nervous, but Bruce's introduction, the video and the testimonials from the members of the churches really clinched it. The Presbytery approved the Amalgamation of Gordon, Knox and St Aidan's.

Hallelujah

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The Israelites had not known where they were going for 40 years, but they finally arrived. And in the last three and a half verses of the reading from Deuteronomy, describes what they were to do when they began to harvest the first fruits in this new land. This liturgy of the presentation of the first fruits of the harvest calls for God's people to remember this heritage. And even more important for them to remember that it was God alone who freed them from slavery; led them with a pillar of clouds by day and a pillar of fire by night; fed them manna and quail and brought them to the promised land.

If God's people did not remember this history, then they might begin to think that it was because of their own virtue or perhaps even blind luck that they were finally settled in their own land. They might begin to think that their harvest and whatever else they owned belonged solely to them and was for their use and pleasure. They might begin to think that they were the captains of their own future and not indebted to anyone else.

God has been at work in our world since the beginning of time to draw us close to God and save us from the sin and evil in ourselves and in our broken creation. God is at the center of our history, especially through Jesus Christ who lived and died for us. Every time we confess our creeds together, we are celebrating that history. Every time we remember our baptisms, we are reclaiming our identity as God's forgiven and beloved children. This is our central story.

In this season of Lent, we would do well to remember our identity and celebrate it. Lent helps us focus on what God has done for us, and on our absolute need for the grace of God. We need to do this so that some false story does not obscure who we really are and who we are meant to be. There are plenty of false stories around: rugged individualism (I don't need anybody), consumerism (I am what I own), nationalism (my country is everything), hedonism (whatever feels good is my soul purpose), and whatever else gives us the idea that we are the center of the universe.

The writer of Deuteronomy calls the people to celebrate the true story of who they are: God's chosen and redeemed people. This remembering and rejoicing leads to renewed dedication and the humble offering of the first fruits of the ground. In this season of Lent, it is good for us to focus on this call for renewed dedication and the offering of what we have been given. When God rescued the Hebrew people from Egypt, when God sent Jesus to the world, when God baptized you and claimed you in Christ, it was to bring you into a close, saving relationship. God loves you. God loves the world in which we live. Let's take time to see this grand picture of salvation and grace. It frames us, our whole life, and all of creation. And then we can respond in thanks and praise.

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Do we know where we are going? Do we have all the answers? Do we know that by the end of 2022 everything will be accomplished? The answer to all these questions is no! We have to remember that this is God's plan and we should be listening to God and what we hear we should share. Just like the Israelites were brought out of slavery and were led to the promised land, God will guide and lead us as we move forward as one congregation and along the way we should be celebrating and thanking God for all that we have received and will receive - and I hope it doesn't take 40 years!

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Gordon's history, Knox's history, St Aidan's history and now our history - is in relationship with God; the One who sent God's own Son to die and rise for us. This is our story, a true story.

In this season of Lent, may we be reenergized to give God thanks and to offer our whole selves to God's good purposes.