

Which Way?



Which way—inland to breed, or skimming the ocean to feed? Perhaps it is better to stay on the beach and go nowhere at all! These Sooty Terns pause before making their decisions.

At the start of Jesus' ministry, he too was faced with making a decision. He went apart into a desert place and wrestled with possibilities as he sought God's will. Eventually Jesus chose—for the present. We are told in Luke 4:14, that the tempter, who suggested attractive ways of ministry that were not God's way, departed from him only for a time.

We might think that one such 'agonised over' prayerful decision about the way forward should have been enough for Jesus as Son of God. But no, like us, he continued to be faced with choices, big and small, throughout his life. At times, he again paused to pray before deciding what to do, but at other times he had to make up his mind 'on the run', so to speak.

Decisions are part of life. When we leave school, we are confronted with what to do next—continue to study or look for a job? Perhaps we have little choice. Will we leave home and live in another town or country? If we have tried the drug scene or become addicted to alcohol or gambling, can we break free? Will we marry this person or not? What about having children and setting up a home? Shall we offer to be a volunteer? The possibility to move into an Aged Care Facility faces us. What will we decide?

Other decisions are less significant in our lives, such as buying a block of chocolate or not, what food we will cook for the evening meal, and whether to stop and talk to someone in the supermarket, or hurry on. We make these decisions quickly and may not even think of God at such moments!

Whether we ponder and pray, or choose quickly, we might wonder later whether we made the 'right' or 'wrong' decision? Are we afraid that if it is 'wrong', not what God wants for us, we have messed up our lives and those of others? Yet all is never lost from God's perspective. Sometimes, what seemed to us to be a 'wrong' way, mysteriously, ends up a better way.

A way can be a direction, the path we travel along, or how we live our lives. In Luke 9:23 Jesus said to his disciples, 'follow me'. He also declared in John 14:6, 'I am the way, and the truth and the life'. Which way will we go? Will we be guided by passion, status, money, retaliation, fear—or something else?

The way of Jesus as shown in the gospels was a journey revealing God's love in the world. It was a way that had purpose and meaning, but also led to conflict and death.

When Mary of Nazareth, in Luke 1:26-38, was confronted by the angel Gabriel with the news she was chosen by God to be the mother of Jesus, the Messiah, she had a choice. She could have rejected such a possibility. Certainly it was a great honour, but as a virgin she knew it would also bring her shame and the possibility of death by stoning. And, what about Joseph? After one short question, Mary accepted.

In Mark 10:46-52, a blind man was begging by the roadside. When he heard that Jesus was passing, he decided to call out, repeatedly! Jesus chose to summon him. Bartimaeus seized the opportunity, received his sight and followed Jesus 'on the way'. That morning in Jericho when he woke up, he could not have imagined that his life would be turned upside down before evening.

As we stumble along trying to follow Christ's way we sometimes end up veering off in another direction. In these wanderings and subsequent outcomes, we can experience the great love and mercy of God who holds us, heals us, and offers us hope in the most hopeless and painful of situations.

When Jesus entered the garden of Gethsemane, he struggled with what was to come. How would he face it? Would God save him? What would happen to his friends and God's work if he was killed? Could his sleepy companions assist him? In the end it was the earth that supported him as he lay on the ground (Mark 14:35), and an angel that strengthened him (Luke 22:43).

Judas, Peter, Pilate, the Jewish leaders and others made what we might judge as 'wrong' choices. God's plan to show men and women God's way of love in Jesus the Christ had come a disastrous and horrific end. But, amazingly, through such failure the power of God raised Jesus to new life; the disciples were forgiven and filled with the Spirit of Christ to strengthen and direct them forward.

Strangely, God still chooses to work through our 'right' *and* 'wrong' choices as we participate with Christ in God's mission of healing, redemption and new life in the world.

We all are free to choose to follow Christ, no matter what we have done in the past. God's love continues to draw and support us as we journey on the way of Jesus, using unexpected people, nature, events and our decisions.

Which way will we go today?

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