

January 23, 2022

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10

“Finding Our Bearings”

Some of you may have had the opportunity several years back to see that classic of cinematic artistry, “*Talidega Nights: The Legend of Ricky Bobby.*” Many of you may have had a family member, or better judgement, keep you from it. So let me fill you in. This is another role in which Will Ferrell plays someone whose *confidence outruns his ability*. He made a career playing those roles. In this movie he races cars. In this scene his friend tries to help him discover his inner connection to the car he is driving.

(Play clip)

“I’m embarrassed. I really thought I could feel it.” This is, of course, hyperbole mixed with comedy. But it points to something quite serious: *our need to be able to find our way* – and the impact our choices for *what or who will guide us*. Sometimes we know what we know what we know. And it is good. Other times, like Ricki Bobby, we are sure we feel something which turns out to be quite different than we thought. So, the question is – “How do we get our bearings?”

In our text today from one of the less popular books of the Bible – the people of Israel are – like us – *passionately wanting to find their way to a new future as God’s people*. They decide the way to get their bearings is to hear God’s word to them through the law given to the nation.

When we hear texts like this, *we imagine leaders brow beating the people into listening*. But that’s not what the text says. It says *the people brow beat Ezra* into going to get the book of the law and *the people built* the scaffold for him to stand on so they could hear when he read it.

What’s our first step in finding our way? *We know we need help*. We know we need to reconnect with ***the call of God*** in our lives as individuals and as a community of faith – and we want it so bad we can taste it – and we take practical steps to get there.

If we are going to take steps – it helps to know in what direction we should go. And if we are going to ask for help – it is crucial to know *who can help us*. The people stand for hours and listen to God’s desire in the law being read – and then they had scholars and teachers interpret the reading for them for clarities sake.

How many times have you tried to read the Bible and found yourself struggling? If you tell me you have never had this experience *you are kidding me or kidding yourself*. We all have this experience. And what’s worse – it has a way of sapping our desire to hear the word of the Lord. We want to ask, “*Lord, if you really want me to understand this, why did you make it so hard?*”

I am confident it is not because God wants to know we are serious. And it certainly isn’t that God is weeding those of us who aren’t very bright out of the flock. It isn’t really *God putting roadblocks in our way* at all – but the history of how we got the library of faith we call the Bible. There are more cross-cultural stories, images, and references than we ever imagined in *this book which knows us so well*. We are right to look to it for truth about who we are and how God wants us to live. *We are kidding ourselves if we think it is easy*: If we think we can simply hold the book in our hand and feel the road beneath us and drive blindfolded – we are going to have a similar outcome to Ricki Bobby.

We find our bearings by *knowing we need to look*. We get better at finding our way when *we know who to ask for help*. And the final touch in our reading today shows *us we get where we need to go when we have the courage to follow through*. **Courage is born of focusing on God rather than ourselves**. It is too easy to give up when we focus on ourselves.

The children of Israel heard the law and its meaning and *burst into tears*. Why? Because the life it described for God’s children was not the life they were leading. *It felt like a dark day because their focus was on themselves*. To fix what ailed them they were told, this is a holy day to the Lord – enjoy yourselves! Take care of those less fortunate! Remember your strength comes from finding joy in God. Pay attention to all God is – all God inspires you to become as God’s beloved child.

We can find our bearings...when we focus on and follow the one who loves us best. Be brave: Focus and follow.