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Reading: Selections from **the Hebrew Prophets**
translated and read by the Rev. Dr. Ted Lutz

The Message: On a Journey Just Begun: the Corps of Discovery

I need to begin by referencing the title. The word 'corps' -- that's not corpse of discovery btw! C O R P S is a military term for a group with an assigned task. I like it because it's from the Latin for 'body' and Jesus called us to be the 'body of Christ.' -- a group with the task of following Christ's teachings.

This week, Carol Hennigar and I attended a training event to assist churches in transition. And in preparation, we were introduced to author Tod Bolsinger's book, *Canoeing the Mountains*.

In it, he describes the journey that began in 1804 when Thomas Jefferson sent Lewis and Clark to find the water route to the Pacific Ocean, a water route people had believed was there for 300 years.

Lewis and Clark put together a 'Corps of Discovery,' with varied skills for the journey including some really good boat builders.

They spent the winter with the Mandan tribe who told them they could find their way to the Pacific Ocean, but there would be some mountains. What they thought would be similar to Appalachian mountains were the Rocky Mountains.

It turned out that those boat builders knew how to build iron framed boats -- but the only one they build failed days after it was built. Instead they had to learn to build canoes from the indigenous people along the way that they could portage for miles. And crossing the Rockies, boat building of any kind was irrelevant.

When they realised they were not yet fully equipped for the journey, Lewis and Clark hired a French Canadian trapper to guide them along the way along with his purchased Shoshonee wife Sakakawea. It turned out that the trapper was mostly useless, but Sakakawea was the most important member of the corps, interpreting, guiding and along with her infant son, providing reassurance to the tribes they met that the corps were not a threat. She was the one who pointed out the pass through the Rockies. Sakakawea was the one who rescued from a capsized canoe the all important journals that recorded information about the natural habitat, flora and fauna; the many tribes that they met; and the indigenous route that eventually became the path to the Pacific.

What did Lewis and Clark learn that helped them to get their whole corps across this great continent?

Change Everything

You have to be prepared to change everything. All the preparation in the past became irrelevant for the future.

And in many ways, Bolsinger argues, this is where the church finds itself: we have been trained and equipped to be people who are really good with water routes, but now imagine climbing up to the top of a ridge, expecting to see a river flowing down to the Pacific, but there is an even higher set of mountains.

We are the 'corps of discovery who were prepared to be the church in one kind of world and face challenges our ancestors in faith didn't imagine.

We have been chosen to step into the future with confidence, even though it will often feel like our gifts and skills and resources don't prepare us for the task.

Lewis and Clark were incredibly successful despite their challenges. Perhaps there are hints for us in their story.

All are Needed

- In Lewis and Clark's corps of discovery, only one person deserted and one died of appendicitis. Despite their mismatched set of skills and challenges, all were needed. When one path proved impassable, they backtracked or sent folk out in small groups to discover the best way forward.
- We are in this together, trying our best, backtracking when we find a barrier, going off in small groups to see which path is best, discovering new paths -- pooling our wisdom.
- At critical points, when they weren't sure what direction to take, Lewis and Clark consulted the corps of discovery and sought consensus. All had a voice. Shaver and Mock and the Joint Amalgamation Committee -- the initial corps followed these same patterns..

Look to the Margins

- The most important decision Lewis and Clark took was to trust the many indigenous peoples they met on their journey, They asked for directions. Learned to survive, and fulfilled their mandate to gather scientific information.
- And most surprising of all, they placed their fate in the hands of the Shoshonee woman Sakakawea.

It's Not Just for us.

- Lewis and Clark set off on this journey, not for themselves, but for others. After they returned, their story didn't make much of a ripple initially, but in so many ways it defined the future.

The journey of amalgamation is primarily and inward looking journey. Trying to bring two disparate cultures together. It's hard work. Bolsinger reminded me of something important. The challenge of change is loss. The challenge of change is loss. Which is why even positive change can feel uncomfortable.

At this first anniversary, it's as if we are reaching the ridge of the Appalachians, and instead of an easy drifting down a river ahead of us, we see a whole continent ahead -- and then the Rockies!

But we are the Corps of Discovery. We are making a journey that few have made before us. Challenged to look to the margins for wisdom. To realise we are all needed for the journey, even though our skills may be more for canoeing than for climbing, and that we are doing this, not only for ourselves, but for those who come after, and for those who need what we have to offer.

When over 90 people gathered after church on Nov. 3rd to talk about our vision for the future, the overwhelming focus of our visions was directed outward: toward the marginalised in our community. Yes, we were concerned to take care of one another, to be strengthened on our spiritual journey, but even this early on the journey, we have heard the voices of Amos, of Hosea, of Micah

let justice cascade like water;
Honesty, like a never-failing stream.

For it is faithfulness that I desire, not sacrifice;
morally good behaviour, not burnt offerings.

Then comes the answer, as relevant now as it was then:
You have been informed, mortal:
What is better?
What is the Lord looking for from you?
Is it not to put into practice justice and faithful love,
and to walk respectfully with your God?

Today we have an opportunity to make a commitment, to profess the faith that is a gift from God that follows us all our lives. As charter members of CHRIST FIRST, we are the corps of discovery who will be known in the future for our faithfulness.