

Reflection for Tuesday 30th June

These words are on cards I've received:

We cannot direct the wind but we can adjust the sails....

Life is like riding a bicycle. In order to keep your balance, you must keep moving.

I have no experience of sailing and I haven't enjoyed riding a bicycle for many years. However, I have memories of watching others and admiring them doing so.

In life, opportunities and choices come and go. Sometimes I hear people reflect:

"If only I had my time again...." Or, "What if" "If only"

While these are understandable questions and it is naturally part of our humanity at times to ask them of ourselves, it is circumspect to recall that any decision is made in a context of many other considerations. Hindsight may be a good thing, but not if it fails to take into account everything else going on at the time.

We believe that God, as professed by the writer of the Hebrews **"is the same today, yesterday and forever" (Hebrews 13: 8).**

Let me remind you of the Apostle Paul's story in Acts 22: 1 - 22 New International Version (NIV) and how he had to cling on to that truth about God, when so much changed for him.

"Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defence." When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.

Then Paul said: "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished. About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, "Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?"

"Who are you, Lord?" I asked.

"I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting," he replied. My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

"What shall I do, Lord?" I asked.

"Get up," the Lord said, "and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do." My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. He stood beside me and said, "Brother Saul, receive your sight!" And at that very moment I was able to see him.

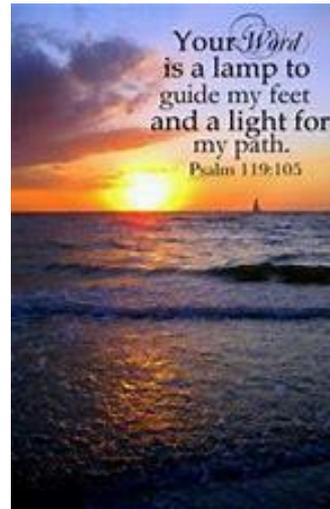
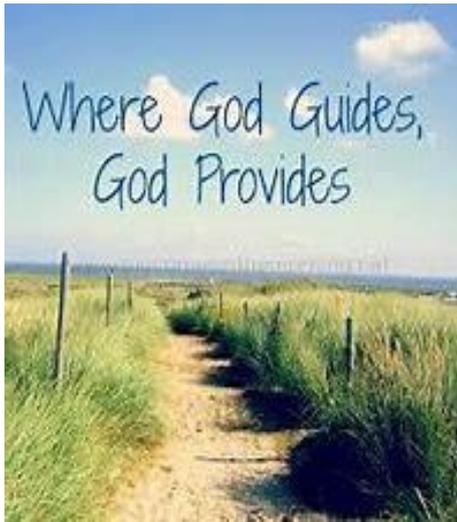
Then he said: "The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name."

When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking to me. "Quick!" he said. "Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me."

"Lord," I replied, "these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him." Then the Lord said to me, "Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles."

The Almighty Creator God had a plan for this treacherous Saul, to become Paul. God's purpose was to use him as a mouthpiece to speak out to both Jews and Gentiles about God's love for all people, so that others would come to know the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, for themselves; Jesus, who was the Son of God, the Risen Lord, who had turned his life completely around in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. In time, Paul was to find himself not only sailing, but shipwrecked. He would find himself not only off balance, but right 'off his feet', being persecuted, tortured, imprisoned and, although an educated scholar, made out to be a liar. He had to cling on to the truth he'd come to know that God was with him, Jesus had saved and would strengthen him spiritually, emotionally and physically. There were surely times when he doubted himself and maybe questioned God's guidance for what he was doing. But what did he do? He called on God, whose 'call' on him was to 'Keep moving'... and so..... these words of Isaiah ring true written years before Paul, which are so relevant for us today too: **Isaiah 58: 7 – 12**

Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: "Here I am. If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always. He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings".



Thank you, Almighty God and Heavenly Father, that you will lead and guide continually, for you promise that you will give provision for every step of the way I take. You affirm that, even as you have begun a good work in me, you will complete and perfect it. You are my creator and you have not abandoned me. You have not abandoned us and nor will you ignore us. You will always finish what you start without fail, or mistake. You are the same yesterday, today and forever. Thank you, risen Lord Jesus. Amen.

