



Canoeing the COVID mountain – pastor Jerry

Tod Bolsinger wrote Canoeing the Mountains about leadership in changing times. It's based on the Lewis and Clark Expedition that opened up the western part of the United States. They'd hoped to find a water passage across America to the Pacific ocean. Then, they hit the Rocky Mountains. Thus the title, "Canoeing the Mountains."

The last few months have been a "canoeing the mountains" experience for me. I used to poke fun at televangelists – now, I am one. I was satisfied with my aging technical knowledge, now I'm learning to be a video and sound tech and a YouTube and Facebook contributor.

Most recognize that the church of the 1980s and 90s had become irrelevant. But many, including me, had hoped we could just keep "heading west" towards the setting sun doing church "as usual." Then we hit the COVID-19 Mountain and, like Lewis and Clark, have to carry our canoes over rough and unknown territory because we might need them again.

Words can grate on your nerves. For me the chant and often rant – "It will never be the same" are such words. Life has always been a river. You can never step into the same water twice. But life, while chaotic, is not out of control. The river is going somewhere. I can learn to swim. You can, too. Or, you can give up the expedition and stand, sit, or lie down on the bank.

A shepherd boy who became a King said it this way: "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:1-4).

There's a movement of grace towards a destination we cannot yet see – a lying down becomes a leading beside and restoration as we live in ways that honor God even when the river of life becomes a raging rapids where we fear change but trust in God's guidance and goodness.

Bolsinger writes: "If you can adapt and adventure, you can thrive. But, you must let go, learn as you go, and keep going no matter what." I agree. This is a time when every church – including those struggling and dying – can reassess what we do, how we do it, and why it needs done. When facing a mountain you must decide what baggage to leave behind. Now, let's do church.

Thanks to pastor Kent Crow of Hudson First UMC for the seminal thought behind this musing. His on-line weekly update is informative and affirming. We miss our friends in Florida and keep you in prayer as we look forward to the day we get in our Nissan canoe and visit you.