

I find it hard to believe but it was about 15 years ago that I got my first Sat Nav. Prior to that going anywhere of any distance involved going onto the RAC Route Planner, or the AA equivalent, and printing out written instructions which you then tried to follow – and if you were by yourself, that could always be a little challenging. And, of course, prior to that, we simply used maps.

But now I am almost totally reliant, whenever we go anywhere, on that wonderful thing that is called, Google Maps. I think it's just amazing. If I don't know where my destination is, it tells me. If I don't know the best way to get there, it tells me. And if on the way I miss a turning, it will either give me that wonderful message, "make a U-turn", or more normally it will give me a little change to the route to cope with my incompetence.

But the most amazing thing about Google Maps is, if it is possible to do so, it will re-route you to avoid traffic congestion. I'm sure you have all experienced that horrible position where you left home and Google tells you your expected time of arrival is in 2 hours, and an hour later it is telling you your expected time of arrival is still in 2 hours, or worse still in 3! But then you get that wonderful message, "We have found an alternative route which will reduce your journey time by 40 minutes, would you like to take it?" (or words to that effect) and you can't get to the button which says, "Of course I want to take it – what do you think I am stupid" – or sometimes it just says "Yes".

But it is not without its issues. Many of us have been diverted up farm tracks, or other unsuitable roads that Google has clearly got wrongly described in its database. But the biggest concern for me is often when I realise, "I have absolutely no idea where I am." Mr Google is telling me I am on the right route. I have no choice but to carry on following these instructions, and hope all will be well. I am happy to be re-routed.

Paul's instructions in our first reading this morning were much less clear – or so it appears at first reading. Paul, the great missionary, the great church planter of the period just after Jesus' crucifixion, is just starting out on his second of three, missionary journeys. At this point, the Christian church only existed in the province of Asia, and it seems that Paul's plan was to carry on where he left off with his first journey, perhaps re-visiting some of the churches he had already set up, or at least working in the same province.

But God clearly had different ideas. We are told that the Holy Spirit had forbidden them to speak the word in Asia. We are not told how this, "Don't go there" manifested itself – perhaps they were barred entry into somewhere, perhaps it was going to be too dangerous at that time, we don't know. But the important thing is that they were forbidden to go to Asia. And so they moved on to a place called Bithynia but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. By this stage Paul and his colleagues must have been getting a bit worried. They clearly had a plan, and their first two attempts to follow that plan had been barred to them.

But then things moved in a more positive direction. Rather than the negative instructions which we know nothing about, what happened next is much clearer. "Then a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man from Macedonia was standing and pleading with him saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" And Paul and Co went.

Paul clearly knew that the Holy Spirit, this helper that God sent to us after the death and resurrection of his son Jesus, had taken his plans for the second missionary journey – and had re-routed them. Many of us during our lives have had similar experiences where, what we thought we were going to be doing, got somewhat changed. Perhaps it was a job we were doing, and then we just felt the need to change that job and do something very different. Perhaps we were associating with some people who we thought were having a good influence on our lives, but God knew differently. Or perhaps God would send us somewhere which would end up having a very significantly positive impact on our lives. Our lives are susceptible to change at any time, but how do we know that it is the Holy Spirit that it is driving us in a different direction, or perhaps it is just a personal whim, or worse, it is the work of the devil trying to stop us doing what God wants us to do? I suggest there are 4 things that we need to consider when trying to answer that question, or more generally, how do you pursue the calling that God is having on your life.? And our reading will help us to explain this.

1. Direction. You are going to need a sense of direction as you explore God's calling on your life. If in your bibles at home, or you can find these on the internet, you look at a map of Paul's second missionary journey, the first part looks very winding and crooked. It's almost as if Google Maps is re-routing them to avoid traffic, but of course it's not Google Maps, it's the Holy Spirit, as they aim for the first city and the Spirit says No, and then they aim for the second city and the Spirit says No, and they end up in Troas which was a place they never had any intention of going to. But that is where God wanted them to be. How do we know? Well, Paul had a vision telling them to go to Macedonia, which required a ship – and what was Troas - a port, the other side of the water from Macedonia. So that all made sense. But there is a second point to come from this part of the story – a No, or even two No's in this case, from God is always followed by a redirect to something better. What we don't know when we accept the No's is what the something better will be. The question we have to ask ourselves is will we be able to trust God if the destination and the direction is not what we expected?
2. Vision. After a series of No's they got an actual vision. The fact that the vision is a man from Macedonia is important – because going to Macedonia was the first step towards bringing Christianity into Europe. Paul's vision was small – he was looking at cities. God's was much larger – he was looking at continents. As big as you and I dream, God will dream bigger. In Ephesians chapter 3 verse 20 we read, "Now to him who by the power at work with us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all can imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations". We need God's vision: his dreams are bigger, his timing is better, his strategy is perfect.
3. Prayer. When it comes to understanding what God is calling us to, and what He is not, prayer is the key. Whilst we have no evidence of it in this reading, we know from Paul's writings that he was a great man of prayer, and it was only through prayer that Paul would have known that the re-routing of his journey was from the Holy Spirit. But how do we know that Paul having this vision, and them being in a port city, was not just a coincidence? Well, for this we have to trust people's experiences. What can appear to be coincidences are in fact God incidences – things that God has made happen. And how do we know this? The evangelist Reinhard Bonnke (pronounced bonk) said this, "Are

answers to prayer co-incidences? Maybe! But when you stop praying these co-incidences stop happening, and when you start to pray again, they happen again. That's why I believe prayer and answers to prayer are very much connected."

4. Obedience. The most important aspect of this. Is there any value in knowing God's direction and vision for you, and then you do nothing with it? With Paul, on his missionary journey, there was no booming voice – just Paul, with the help of prayer, coming to a conclusion on what he should do next based on a vision. I don't know about you but I don't want God to have to drag me down the road he wants me to travel – I want the sort of concluding faith that Paul had.

Which does rather bring us to the question of, "What has this got to do with me?" Perhaps you think you know what God wants you to do with your life – or perhaps you've never thought about the question in those terms at all. Maybe you have a nice, clear, straight path ahead of you, and you are perfectly happy with that. But what if God has other plans for you? Do you not think you should be asking him? Perhaps God wants to re-route your life – and that can happen at any time: it is never too early or too late.

Many of you will know that after a lifetime of things preventing it, God tapped me on the shoulder at the beginning of 2015 and told me very clearly (although to this day I couldn't tell you how – I just knew) that he wanted me to become a priest in the Church of England. Several things happened over the next three and a half years which could have derailed that, but I had to call on God and say to him, "If you want this to happen I need your help", and I got it.

But working out what is God's vision for me going forward remains a real tension in me. I want to know what God's plans for me are, but he often doesn't work in that way. Instead I need to learn how to be patient and wait, and find out. And there are times when I feel compelled to try and make what I think feels right, happen, but then I realise that is precisely what I shouldn't do. Someone once said, God like to listen about our plans for our lives, and then have a good laugh – as he knows what he has in line for us. If our paths ahead look like they contain a whole series of Google Maps re-routes, who are we to say that is not what God wants? It is up to us to find out what the route that God wants us to take is – and then follow it.

Amen