



... leading us to a home we've never seen, but would recognise as home as soon as we arrived

Bible readings : Jeremiah 8 : 3 - 7; John 14 : 1 - 7

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‘No one has ever seen God’ (John 1 : 18). But the Spirit of God works from inside our human existence, calling us to return to a home we’ve never seen (but would know was home if we did see it). Calling us to follow one who has taken the journey before us.

The experience of that Holy Spirit shared by the disciples confirmed for them most powerfully that it was *Jesus* that the Spirit was turning them towards. As if the invisible, unknowable God were saying in their hearts “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;”¹ “who is ‘lifted up’ for you.”² “No one comes to me except in his way.”³

It’s interesting that the image of the Spirit is of a dove, or in Celtic tradition a wild goose. What do we know about wild geese? They migrate. *They navigate their way to a home they’ve never seen.* The Spirit of God guides us towards a home we’ve never seen.

How on earth do creatures navigate to places, sometimes thousands of miles away, that they’ve never seen? We know quite a lot about how they do it, and all of them have something to teach us about ways in which the Holy Spirit works :

How creatures navigate

- **they’re carried along by the currents**

Sometimes we feel that we’re being carried along on the wind of the Spirit. Not free, yet free. In a worship gathering, maybe, caught up by the pentecostal energy. How can I resist? I know I’m being carried home, even though I don’t know where I’m being taken. I know that, even if it costs me my life, it’s safe.

- **they follow familiar landmarks, smells, chemical trails**

Sometimes we just get the sense that “Yes, this is on the route. I’m on the right track. I’ve never been here before, but I recognise the place.”

¹ Mark 1:11, Matt 3:17, Luke 3:22

² John 3:14, 8:28, 12:32

³ John 14:6

- **they're guided by the position of the sun and reflected light patterns, or by the pattern of the stars**

Sometimes we get the feeling that what we're seeing makes a pattern, and it makes sense. It adds up, it makes sense. It's not that 'this idea' on its own makes sense, or 'that experience,' but that looking at the whole picture of Christian belief and experience—some of it contradictory—it hangs together and is trying to point us in the direction we need to be facing.

- **they can steer by correlating the position of sun with an inbuilt clock that tells them what time it is and where the sun should be**

. . . and sometimes we know that “the time is *now*. I have a decision to make, and I must not delay making it.” Or, or course, “Now is *not* the time to be decisive—the pattern does not yet make sense, I must wait a while longer.”

- **they're guided by an inbuilt magnetic compass**

More mysterious still—nothing we see or think, but just a deep sense of when we are not, or when we are on the right track.

We're migratory creatures, you and I. Just as, in many different ways, creatures are called (like Abraham was⁴) to leave the only place they've ever known and head for 'home,' so the wild goose, the Spirit of God, works inside us, guiding us, enticing us, prompting us, reassuring us, turning us towards the unknowable God in the face of Jesus, the prophet from Galilee.

How many people live their lives suppressing all this? How many people allow themselves to be perpetually distracted by the false signposts along the way? How many choose the simple path and try to follow just one star, instead of reading the whole pattern of landscape below, starlit heaven above? (So that, like moths circling round the lightbulb that they mistake for the moon, they end up getting their wings burnt?)

How many people put off decisions that need to be made *now*, and get lost? Or how many impatiently force decisions that should have been waited for, and lose their way as a result?

⁴ Genesis 12

How many suppress the urgings, the promptings within? How many are never encouraged to look seriously at patterns and landmarks of the spiritual life built up over centuries of Christian experience? Or if they *are* given the opportunity, simply can't be bothered?

In creatures (I gather) some of this navigational ability is inbuilt. It's genetic, it's hard-wired into the brain. Maybe some people are genetically more open to the Holy Spirit than others. Some people will always depend on others because their sense of who and where they are has been damaged. Some people have a gift of spiritual intuition. In some it gets horribly corrupted because they follow false landmarks, others become saints.

But much of it can be learned. Wild geese fly in 'V' formation—the experienced ones who know the way in front, the followers learning the feel of the landmarks and light patterns as they go, and being boosted by the up-draught from the stronger leaders' wings. "I am the Way. . . . noone gets there without me."⁵

All of these are images of the way that the God works from *inside* us, connecting us to the signs all around us, working *in* us so we recognise at a deep level the feelings and ideas that will lead us and our universe home—and also recognise the feelings and ideas that will lead us *off* the dance floor, out into the dark, and over the edge of dry land into the chaos of the cold deep ocean. In Jesus we see the pattern of human life that the Spirit of God works in our world. He is our familiar landmark, we are heading home when our lifestyle echoes his; he it is that teaches us to recognise the Way and supports us as we follow.

As it says in the URC's Statement of Faith :

*Source, Guide and Goal of all that is: to God be eternal glory.*⁶

⁵ John 14:6

⁶ see *Rejoice & Sing* No.761