

2023 WORLD CONFERENCE CLOSING MESSAGE

# A New Question for the Journey

‘How do we courageously walk  
with Jesus, the peaceful One?’

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*President Veazey delivered this message at the  
closing of the 2023 World Conference,  
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Independence, Missouri, USA.*



"Courageously walking WITH Christ means we are being formed daily by the Spirit, mind, and light of Christ. It means we are seeing what Christ sees, going where Christ goes, giving as Christ gives, and acting as Christ acts."

"Journey" is an image commonly used to portray human experience. Some of the earliest-known writings are about heroic quests undertaken despite seemingly insurmountable odds. Typically, these ancient stories describe the wisdom gained or transformation experienced by the traveler.

However, not all journeys are choices. Some are imposed on people, who must display remarkable courage to survive. Forced relocations from ancestral lands, torturous ocean crossings of the enslaved, and desperate flights from poverty, climate crisis, and violence are examples.

Of course, other journeys are simply episodes of our lives, like leaving home for university, relocating for a job, or moving to support family members in need. These are courageous journeys, too!

"Journey" is a regular scriptural theme. Challenging journeys, usually spanning multiple generations, are a primary way people of devotion, spiritual resilience, and vision are shaped.

Jesus went on many journeys. Scripture recalls his journey to Egypt as a refugee baby and his childhood journey to the temple. He journeyed to his baptism. He journeyed to the wilderness to face temptations and clarify what it meant to be Messiah. He journeyed to various places—some quite remote—to offer good news about the reign of God. His journeys across cultural, religious, and social boundaries authenticated his message.

Of course, his most courageous journey was when he went to Jerusalem for the last time. He went, knowing how the religious and political forces were converging to arrange for his death. He went anyway, true to his vision and calling until the end.

In the words of John 13:1 NRSV:

...Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

In the original Greek, the phrase "to the end" does not mean a point in time or final stop. It means "to the fullest extent possible." That is, divine love had done all that could be done to reorient wayward humanity to a better direction for ourselves and creation.

The disciples' walk to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–

14 NRSV) shows us that fully awakening to the presence of Christ is a journey. Ruth Haley Barton, in *Life Together in Christ*, explores the Emmaus journey as a process of becoming increasingly open to the love, light, and truth of Christ.

The issue was never whether Christ was present...the issue was whether the disciples had the capacity to recognize him...and that was something that developed over time, as they shared the journey. Their ability to discern the presence of Christ progressed throughout the story: first they saw him as a stranger, then as a traveling companion, then as a teacher, then as a guest, then as a host, and finally as their Messiah and resurrected Lord.

When their eyes finally were fully opened, he vanished from their sight. Some get hung up on how that could be. For me it highlights a profound truth. Christ was going ahead of them to where more ministry and invitation were needed. Now the disciples needed to decide whether to alter their course to follow him into new experiences even if it meant changing their plans for the journey they thought they were on..

Our church history has been a courageous, colorful, sometimes-tragic, but always future-oriented journey. Doctrine and Covenants 164:9 describes it as a "continuing faith adventure with God [that] has been divinely led, eventful, challenging, and sometimes surprising..."

The excellent three-volume church history series, written by Mark Scherer, is aptly named *The Journey of a People*. I wonder how the fourth volume will describe the part of the journey we are living now! Regardless, our story consistently teaches that God always is guiding the church if we are willing to follow.

As noted, there are inner personal journeys that involve self-discovery, spiritual awakening, and transformation. Dag Hammarskjöld, second secretary-general of the United Nations, wrote: "The longest journey is the journey inward." Doctrine and Covenants 161:3d counsels "... the road to transformation travels both inward and outward."

Author Elizabeth O'Connor told of a Christian community organized around two spiritual journeys—the interior one toward knowing our

true self and knowing God, and the one directed outward into the world to enact God's justice and love. Another author, Diana Butler Bass, identifies these two interrelated movements as the way of Jesus (Diana Butler Bass referencing Elizabeth O'Connor in *Freeing Jesus: Rediscovering Jesus as Friend, Teacher, Savior, Lord, Way, and Presence*).

Sometimes we make it too complicated! The inner journey of knowing ourselves and God and the outward journey of enacting God's love and justice can be embodied by individuals or groups anywhere as naturally as breathing in and out.

Of course, spiritual journeys—whether individual or communal—are not so much about final arrivals as they are ongoing movements. The hymn, "How Many Times We Start Again," (Community of Christ Sings 560) describes it well:

How many times we start again on faith's  
unwinding way: we want, O Lord to settle in,  
to build a home and stay, but then a dream, a  
voice, a light disturbs our peace and rest and  
sets before our straining sight new stages on  
our quest.

We are in "new stages on our quest." This week we have wrestled with complex issues. We have made decisions to act or not act in certain ways that will shape our journey for many years to come.

An important aspect of this part of our journey is to discern God's redemptive activity in the world today, our role in it, and characteristics needed for future leadership. We are engaged in a discernment process that will be blessed with positive outcomes if we follow the phases, steps, and questions before us.

Asking questions is faithfulness because we genuinely are seeking God's guidance all the time. However, discernment of any type is not a time to pause or take a "wait and see" attitude before engaging in ministry. Often, insights come as we respond and reflect on our ministry experiences!

Continuing Revelation provides guidance for the church and offers assurance that we are headed in the right direction, or it spiritually nudges us to get us back on track. Doctrine and Covenants Section 164:9a affirms that we "...are poised to fulfill God's ultimate vision for the church."

Poised means that the capacity to answer God's call is present within all of us, yearning to be fully released. From this and other passages, we see that Community of Christ has a hopeful future of continuing adventure with God, if we choose it! But make no mistake, choosing the future God envisions will require discernment, courage, sacrifice, generosity, flexibility, and creativity!

At the close of the 2019 World Conference, I asked two related questions: "Are we moving toward Jesus, the peaceful One? Or are we retreating from Jesus by reverting to our old humanity and its

destructive ways...?"

The first question became a guiding challenge for the church. However, it is important to remember both questions. "Are we moving toward Jesus, the peaceful One? Or are we retreating from him by reverting to our old ways...?" These are not simple "yes" or "no" questions. They invite us into deep reflection on the overall direction of our lives, individually and together.

As we come to the end of this World Conference, focused on the theme "Courage," another question comes to mind. This question arises from my reflections on how we are moving toward Jesus, the peaceful One. It is: "How do we COURAGEOUSLY WALK WITH Jesus, the peaceful One?"

Courageously walking WITH Christ means we are being formed daily by the Spirit, mind, and light of Christ. It means we are seeing what Christ sees, going where Christ goes, giving as Christ gives, and acting as Christ acts.


Our courageous journey is one of continuous formation in Christ expressed through sacred community that is Christ's light, leaven, and salt in the world (Matthew 5:13–16; Luke 13:20–21 NRSV).

Many types and degrees of community in the world serve their purposes. We are called to courageously walk with Jesus Christ and in the process become sacred community through which Christ is revealed. That is what it means to be Community OF Christ!

May God bless us with courage as we walk with Jesus, the peaceful One, sharing Christ's peace everywhere we go!







*"How many times we start again on faith's unwinding way: we want, O Lord to settle in, to build a home and stay, but then a dream, a voice, a light disturbs our peace and rest and sets before our straining sight new stages on our quest."*

Community of Christ Sings 560