

Over the season of Lent this year, we've been following a theme that has been running through the Old Testament Lessons appointed to be read each Sunday – that of Covenant. We started thinking of Covenant in terms of relationship between God and man that developed from the basic Covenant with Noah between God and man through to the Covenant with Abram, subsequently reaffirmed with Isaac and Jacob. We then went on to think of Covenant in terms of promises and commitment – the promise of descendants, the promise of land. Another theme that runs through the Old Testament is that of failure, as the people fall away from their commitment to the Covenant, and reconciliation – we spoke of God as a God of fresh starts, of new beginnings.

Today I want to pick up on another theme that has been running through our story – that of journey, or a series of journeys:

that of Abram, called to journey to the land of Canaan.

in the time of famine in the land, in the story of Jacob and Joseph, there is the journey down into Egypt.

then in the time of Moses, there is the journey out of slavery and back into the promised land.

in the 8th century, in the period of the great prophets, as the people came to put their trust in foreign alliances that turned sour, there came the fall of Jerusalem and the journey into Exile.

There was if you like, on the part of the people, a journey in and out of promise.

Then at different points in the Biblical story there is the prospect of hope. Writing to a people languishing in Exile, the prophet Isaiah speaks of new beginnings, of a fresh start. To a people who had experienced the desolation of

the destruction of Jerusalem, the bitterness of Exile, who thought that God was no longer there any more, the prophet declares:

¹³ Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth;
break forth, O mountains, into singing!
For the LORD has comforted his people,
and will have compassion on his suffering ones.

¹⁴ But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me,
my Lord has forgotten me."

¹⁵ Can a woman forget her nursing child,
or show no compassion for the child of her womb?
Even these may forget,
yet I will not forget you.

¹⁶ See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands;
your walls are continually before me. *Is 49:14-15*

One of the features of the Covenant journey is hope, a hope that has its roots in the conviction that even in his apparent absence, God is with his people. Hope is essentially focussed on the future