

## **EXODUS 14:10-14**

As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt: 'Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." But Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still."

## **MARK 11:20-24**

Have faith in God. Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, "Be taken up and thrown into the sea, and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you."

## **LESSONS FROM THE MOUNTAIN: EPISODE 6**

### **KEEP GOING!**

**Exodus 14:10-14**

**Matthew 7:7-8**

The closer it got, the more apprehensive I grew. As we began planning our hiking trip to somewhere in Europe, we reviewed numbers of options in different countries that could fit into the brief time frame available to us. The winner turned out to be Ireland which checked all of our boxes and for which the touring company, Wonderful Ireland, came with a personal

recommendation from a reliable source. It was a perfect setup—five days of hiking through the Wicklow National Forest and a total of three days in Dublin to explore the city and absorb the culture.

So why the apprehension? you might ask. The hike itself was rated as “moderate” which should be well within our abilities and levels of fitness. And I was fine with that until we received our pre-trip packet which provided us with all of the details of luggage transport, meals and accommodations along the way. It also included descriptions of the hikes we would be taking from village to village. It was Day Two that got my attention. Its length was 19 kilometers with significant altitude changes! Are you kidding me? This is “moderate”? If this is “moderate”, what would “difficult” look like?

Bear in mind that we are not novices. Every year when we go to North Carolina, we hike trails that are designated as “difficult”—and believe me, they are not for the faint hearted! But in most cases, they are no more than 5 or 6 miles and give you everything you can ask for. And this 19-kilometer, 12 mile hike, included several very steep ascents up to Dcousie Mountain and the brochure advised us to allow 7 hours to finish. Yikes!

A week before we left, my wife spoke on the phone with Wonderful Ireland’s owner about another matter and casually mentioned that I was a little concerned about Day Two. “Oh,” he replied, “it’s not as bad as it looks. After the first two and a half hours, it levels out.” That did a whole lot to comfort me! What had been a sort of back burner anxiety nearly became a full-fledged panic attack!

Understand that I am strong enough, but I am prone to getting tendonitis in my knees and feet when I overdo and we would still have two more challenging days ahead of us after this and what if I was just too sore the next day and what if this and what if that and I had worked myself into an almost sleepless night before the hike. And true to form, because we had spent the two prior days walking the streets of Dublin, my knees were already aching and my feet were sore. Walking on sidewalks does that to me. My fears were becoming realities.

While I am not in any sense of the word equating my angst with that of the Israelites as they faced a very dangerous and risky escape attempt from Egypt, the emotional dynamics are exactly the same. And they are identical to the ones each of us faces as we approach what we know is going to be a situation fraught with adversity. It is beside the point of whether or not you considered her allegations against Brett Kavanaugh to be relevant, can you imagine how Christine Blasey Ford felt before her interrogation by the Senate Intelligence Committee with a national TV and radio audience listening in? When was the last time you felt this way?

*In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?"* The fear is obvious. But there is another emotion lurking in the shadows of the fear and that is doubt. Can this even be done? What if it is beyond the limits of our capabilities?

Following breakfast on Day Two, our driver picked eight of us up at our inn and after a 15 minute ride, deposited us at the trail head. The weather report called for light rain in the morning with clearing in the afternoon. The temperature was in the mid 50's, light winds with fog and mist. Not bad for Ireland. And so we began our ascent walking with another couple from British Columbia who had set the same pace. And up we went and up we went and the scenery became more gorgeous and then stunning as we continued to ascend. But after a couple of miles, the tendonitis in my right knee flared up and I thought, "Oh, no no no no. You can't do this to me! Please don't do this!" And then shortly and miraculously it subsided. It never came back.

The adversity, however, had not even begun. As we continued our journey, the mountain peak we were climbing toward was coming into view—only it wasn't a clear view because the peak was ominously swallowed in a cloud. That portended weather in front of us. It was already early afternoon and where were the clearing skies we had been promised? Oh, did I forget? We were in Ireland. And as we began the final ascent to the shoulder of the

mountain we would hike around, we were rewarded with panoramic views of the Irish Sea, Dublin Harbor, the mountainsides littered with grazing sheep and the lush valleys below. But at the same time the winds were picking up, the temperature was dropping and the light mist was turning to rain.

And the fun was just beginning for as we continued around the mountain, we lost the shelter it had provided from the wind. And now that we had reached the summit of our journey, we began a two and half mile stretch across muddy bogs on what they call the boardwalk which are two railroad ties horizontally bound together with large staples pounded into them with the protruding round tops providing traction. As we started a slippery steep descent into the valley below, the 35 to 40 mph crosswinds pelted us with horizontal rain that felt more like sleet and my hands were so cold I could scarcely grasp my hiking poles. You could not stop, you could not turn back to check on your companions, you dared not turn sideways. The only thing you could do was Keep Going!

I can say that I am glad I did not know in advance what Day Two would bring. I can also say that I am glad I did it and will remember it for the rest of my life. And because we dared not stop until we reached the relative safety of the valley and then allowed ourselves a mere 15-minute break for lunch, we actually made our destination in six hours. Was it fun? I wouldn't say that. Was it rewarding? Infinitely so. Did I learn anything? Absolutely!

I learned about my own apprehensions which were cloaked in self-doubt. And I relearned how important it is to just Keep Going when adversity arises. *Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today..."* You see, beyond the fear, beyond the doubt, there must be faith. There must be a belief in yourself and a belief in a Power that eternally supports you no matter where you are or what you are doing. This was actually at the heart of everything Jesus did and everything he taught. Again and again he challenged his disciples and those who heard him preach to overcome their fears and their doubts with their belief in this Power. *Have faith in God. Truly I*

*tell you, if you say to this mountain, "Be taken up and thrown into the sea, and if you not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you.*

The mountains Jesus refers to are the mountains of doubt within ourselves. And as we climb those mountains, they will always have lessons for us. You may be on a mountain right now that is challenging you. How will you get over it? What lesson is it trying to teach you? Don't turn back. Trust in God to lead you to the top. Ask only for the strength to Keep Going!

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