

32963 – 3-25-09

**By Revs. Robert and Casey Baggott
Community Church of Vero Beach**

Progress on the Journey

Recently we reread a literary classic that we hadn't thought much about in years, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. It's not on many reading lists anymore – perhaps because the old 17th century language is so archaic, or perhaps because its allegorical treatment of life seems so old-fashioned. At any rate, we found that becoming reacquainted with the old story was a good experience for us. Christian, the chief character, is after all, not so different from any of us. As one reviewer of the old book has noted, *Pilgrim's Progress* is such a fine work because it gives a clear and accurate image of just what the life of faith is like. It tells us what to expect when answering the call to follow God down the road of life.

Indeed, the title itself seems to tell us a great deal. The linkage of “pilgrim” and “progress,” reminds us that forward movement in the life of faith is what we all desire – but sometimes don't know how to achieve. Regardless of how we try to make that forward movement happen, it is bound to be characterized by two critically important qualities: struggle and hope. Every life of faith needs these two qualities, for struggle without hope is futile. Yet, hope without struggle is unrealistic.

In fact, if you consider the well-known and best-loved Bible stories of Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Aaron, Ruth and Naomi – these heroes of the faith were on journeys full of both struggle and hope. As author Keith Miller puts it: “The story of the Bible is not the account of supermen and women doing heroic things out of abnormal resources, but rather the story of chicken-hearted folk like you and me who did not give up when they failed, who somehow ‘kept on keeping on’ and dared to put the keys of their future into the hands of a merciful God, even when they were afraid.” In other words, the Bible shows us people who faced grave problems, but were upheld by the gracious and powerful hand of God. And so their struggles were never futile, and their hope was never unrealistic.

Perhaps today you find yourself wondering how to re-energize your own faith journey. Maybe you've reached an impasse, or you've just run a little short of enthusiasm for the journey. Then, we invite you to review the path God has led you along so far. If you are like most of us, there will have been mountain-top moments of great exhilaration and times of deepest despair. But you emerged from these highs and lows better equipped and more confident for the next leg of the trip.

Truthfully, we never know just what might lie ahead, in our walk with God. We lack the ability to see much beyond our own two feet. But, as God's faithful pilgrims from age after age have noted, when you walk with God, that's good enough. So, may your journey's struggles always know hope, and may your pilgrimage make progress!