

We touched last week on how fear interferes with navigation, with maintaining a straight path – which is why we tend to go in circles when we panic, or think we are lost. Fear prevents memory from reminding us of where we are or better of where we've been and where we need to go. Or, as we hear in this description of how Polynesian seafarers found their way around the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean with remarkable accuracy by relying totally on memory and dead reckoning.

*'The Polynesians managed it by calibrating their progress against natural signs: the pattern of waves, the direction of the wind, the shapes and colours of clouds, the behaviour of birds, the smell of vegetation and the movement of sun, moon and stars. The strategy was to arrive in the general vicinity and then home in using local cues.'*

But this system of dead reckoning only works if you don't forget how you got to where you are

*'The navigator must keep a mental log of the canoe's path from the moment he leaves home: how far did we travel today and in which direction, how did the swell affect our course. This requires almost constant observation, which is why navigators learn to nap for no more than half an hour at a time. If all goes well, they will be able to point to their destination or towards home at any point during the journey, even if they cannot give their precise location.'*

Or as one present day navigator puts it

*'Just don't forget. That's not an option. Forgetting means you're lost. And if you think you're lost you are lost.'*

What a marvellous description of the spiritual life and of the need to always keep hold of the story which has brought us to where we are – and why we are hearing several accounts of this story in today's readings and above all in the remembering of Christ's passion, death and resurrection in the celebration of the eucharist. In the gospel we see one version of the call to the first disciple emphasising Peter's initial fear echoing Isaiah's fear in the first reading of his call to be a prophet. And in the second reading we see Paul as a disciple not only of Jesus but of Peter and the Apostles following in the tradition of their call and again with a great sense of unworthiness – the least of the apostles. His job, like theirs as navigator, requires him to remember and remind the people of the good news of where they have come from and where they are heading. It's a huge and necessarily humbling responsibility – for it means not only remembering the return of God in our lives, the good news of rescue, but also the times we've gone wrong, been afraid, got lost – and this both individually and collectively. Where for example are the women in this account of the call of the first disciples? And where were we when the Spirit called at our door and prompted us to this action or that? Were we listening or too busy with our own affairs? Or too afraid to answer the call? The spiritual life is perhaps the bodily life fully alert, using all its senses and the whole body of people to which it belongs, some called to be navigators in a special sense as here, but all of us called to discern who those navigators should be and to follow the best. And so we will hear it said time and again by Jesus 'Stay awake' 'Do not be afraid'.

Br John Mayhead  
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour