

July 2023: Milestones

Recently Richard and I were away for the weekend, celebrating a significant birthday in Richard's family. It was lovely to catch up with the finer details of family news, and to relax with four generations of the family, some of whom we have not seen for many months. Since it tends to take months of preparation, and a collective travel of many hundreds of miles, to gather us all together in one place, it doesn't happen very often. So as we prepared and travelled, I found myself reflecting on the milestones that bring us together as a family.

At one level, the milestones in my life seem endlessly complicated. There are family milestones, such as birthdays or marriages, but which family? In different ways, I belong to several different 'families,' and the members of those 'families' are also part of several families, some of which I don't belong to! And then there are personal milestones, related to my faith, or my achievements, or my experiences. And there's a mixture of milestones marking dates – such as birthdays, and those marking events – such as baptisms. But which is which?

But as I looked deeper, I discovered that all my milestones, personal and family, have something in common. All my milestones are essentially about identity. In different ways, they all mark and celebrate something significant about who I am, either as an individual, or as a member of a family or community. I think milestones serve to help us remember and celebrate the values that are important to us, and the people with whom we belong, and who belong with us.

Of course, milestones are not new. They have almost certainly existed as long as people have existed. And, as with my milestones, they give us fascinating glimpses into what mattered for people. The Bible is an account of a people's life in community, with their God, so the milestones it records are all about community life, and about journeys of faith. So we learn that the agricultural year was incredibly important; sowing, first harvests and later harvests were all celebrated. The ancient Israelites believed their God had rescued them from slavery in Egypt, had led them to the 'Promised Land,' and then sent them into Exile in Babylon when they disobeyed him, before rescuing them again. So all these events were remembered and celebrated annually. For a few key biblical characters we also read of personal milestones, such as visions or visits from angels.

I wonder what your milestones are? Many of us have a mixture of personal, family, community and national milestones. My prayer for us all is that, whatever our milestones are, reflecting on them will help us understand ourselves, and our values, better.

Yours in Christ,
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