

Genesis 12:1-5

Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan,

Exodus 14:10-18

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.'

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground. Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers.'

"Road Trip to Nowhere"

Rev. Charles Schuster

July 25, 2010

Some people think you can never get too much Bible. I'm not one of them, and this may be too much, but I've got another short reading, and if you want to look it up, it's Luke 24:13, or you can just trust me to read it like it says. "On that very day, two of the disciples were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about the things that had happened (that is, the crucifixion) and while they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him."

I want to note something that you would see in the bulletin. Three of the pieces that the choir sang today were written by Zion Park, thank you, Zion, again, beautiful. The last piece was written by Romy Cho, thank you, so much talent, good to have the choir back.

It's obvious that you're rested from the summer. I don't think men understand women, and that's the reason for the book review on Wednesday evening. I don't think women understand men either. So many examples. A couple in divorce court. The judge said, "What is the reason for this divorce?" and she said, "He hasn't talked to me in two years." The judge said to him, "Is that true?" and he said to the judge, "Yes, it's true. I didn't want to interrupt." A woman in a farming community, a meeting dominated by men, discussing farm issues. A woman stood up and spoke. One of the farmers didn't appreciate her intrusion. He thought women ought to be quiet. And the old farmer looked at her and said, "What does she know? I'd like to ask you a question, Mabel. How many toes does a pig have?" She replied, "Take off your boots, Fred, and count them yourself." Men and women are so different, Barbara Tannin is right, we don't understand each other. For women it's about connecting and intimacy. For men it's about status and independence. For women, when on a trip, if lost will ask for directions. It's an opportunity to connect. For men, when lost on a trip, keep driving, don't ask for help, because if you drive a little faster you'll get to the right road even sooner. Men like to think it out and then speak to it; women like to talk it through and then discover what they think about it.

Today, I'd like to give directions for the road trip to nowhere, and I'd like to provide a map if I could. I know the women here will ask for directions, I'm not sure about the men. First of all, there is a road trip, and we have to take it, because life is about leaving. Like Abraham, he left Haran, he left his country, he left his people, he left his home. And the commentators say it's important to note that order. He left his country, he left his people, he left his home. He left everything except some relatives. To live, we have to leave what we know. Sometimes we have to do it. He heard the voice of God. There are other ways in which this is communicated to us. Pastor of a church and the choir director weren't getting along. They were at war with each other. Five weeks. First week, pastor preached, had an altar call. The choir director had the choir sing "We Shall Not Be Moved." Second week, the pastor preached a sermon on stewardship and told the congregation they ought to give a tithe, ten percent. The choir director had the choir sing, "Jesus Paid It All." Third week, the preacher gave a sermon on the evils of gossip. Choir director led the chorus in the hymnal "I Love To Tell the Story". Fourth week, the preacher was discouraged and at the end of the service suggested he was thinking of resigning. Choir director, end of the service with a song, "Why Not Tonight?" Fifth week the pastor surrendered, told the congregation Jesus was leading him to another church. The choir followed the sermon with a rousing rendition of "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

Life is about leaving, and there are messages telling us to leave our comfort zone. There are. Jack Kornfield is Buddhist. He said that we don't know all the reasons, that life comes to us on our spiritual journey, but there is in life that which compels us to go. Bobby Johnson left, this week, football coach, Vanderbilt University, he just quit. He said "Football is not a life, it's a way of life, and it consumes your life, and I'm gonna find some other things for my life." Lou Panella quit, manager of the Cubs, he said, "It's time." Life is about leaving where we're comfortable and wanting to see life in a different way. Last Sunday in this service you may have heard the little boy in the Children's Sermon, you may have heard him, I asked the kids how they were keeping cool in the hot

summer. One little boy said it, he said "I put ice down my pants." If you put ice down your pants it will keep you cool in the summer, first of all, but secondly it will keep you on the move. Like Abraham and Sarah, Adam and Eve, like Lot and Noah, Simon Peter, John and James who put down their nets. Maybe it's a job that isn't challenging your mind, maybe it's a relationship that's toxic. Maybe it's a place where everybody knows your name and you've got to go to a place where you have to wear a name tag. But life is about leaving, and it's always about leaving where we're comfortable.

Second direction on the road trip, that it's a trip to nowhere. It's not about arriving. In life, we never really arrive. Nobody arrives. Moses took his people to the promised land, out of Egypt, in the desert, they thought it would be a quick trip and it wasn't, they complained, the Back to Egypt committee was formed. Weren't there enough graves in Egypt that you brought us out here to die? And the people got to the promised land, but they didn't arrive. If you know their history, it wasn't the paradise they had expected, and the other thing about that is, Moses never did arrive, he died before he got there.

Jonathan Ledbury tells the story of a six-year-old who was walking around the neighborhood with his grandmother. They decided to take a shortcut through the cemetery, stopping to read some of the tombstones. Grandma explained the first date on the tombstone is the date the person was born. The second date on the tombstone is the date that the person dies. "Why do some tombstones have only one date?" the child asked. "Because those people haven't died yet," she answered. When they got back home the child said to his mother and father, "Did you know, some of those people buried in the cemetery aren't dead yet." And you know, it's true. We have a date. We're born, and we may even have a tombstone that has only one date on it for us. And you now we'll never arrive until they put down the other date. It's a road trip to nowhere, and we don't arrive until the end, and if we're alive we haven't arrived.

Wednesday I spent some time at the Larimer County Department of Motor Vehicles. I took a number. It was number 148, the first number called was number 118, I knew it was going to be a long afternoon, so I just sat there and listened to people talk. I heard a teenager say to his father, "Dad, how soon will it be till I'm old enough to do as I please?" And his father said, "I don't know. Nobody has lived that long yet." I heard a woman say to her husband, "You know, I heard a good definition of an agnostic the other day. An agnostic is a sixty year old atheist." That's cerebral, you have to think about that one. I heard someone say to the person sitting beside them, something that was kind of a convoluted thing, but I had all afternoon. "Most people spend their lives working to produce things nobody wants, so that Christmas and birthdays they can search the stores to find the gift that nobody needs in order to give it to the person who has everything."

Passing time, spending time, lingering in time, wandering, wondering, trying not to waste time. Exodus became the high point of Israel's history, lingering and wandering, and there was God in that, yes, oh yes. Until they bury us, we won't have arrived. There will never be a time when we can say, though we want to say it, there will never be a time when we can do it, even if we say it, "I quit, I resign from life. It's over, there's nothing

more for me to do." We will never arrive. Life will always demand that we keep on going.

Today I was going to announce that Rob Bean, one of our church members, has begun paddling his canoe down the river to raise money for the Heifer Project. He was supposed to start today. He's sitting in the second row there, in the front of the church, Hi, Rob. You know why? He didn't get scared. Common sense didn't set into his mind. No, the river's flooding, and he can't go yet, because it's not safe. That's life. That's life. We have to wait. Life happens while we're waiting for something else. Margaret Bonano, who is a writer, once said, "It's possible to live happily ever after on a day-to-day basis." I think one of the most enlightened days John Wesley ever had in his life, with the exception, perhaps, of the day his heart was strangely warm, I think the day that his mind was superbly wired was the day he got the idea that we spend our days moving toward it but never arriving at it, perfection. It's all about transition and travel. It's all about road trips that go nowhere, and the best we can do is to know that we are now here. The journey is the destination, the road is the arrival, for the traveler.

At dinner the other night at Johnson's Corner. It's a truck stop. It's a place of transition, where people on the way discover arrival for a time. And the most amazing thing of all, at Johnson's Corner, is they sell souvenirs. Mementos, that say Johnson's Corner, so you can show people you know you've been there, at a place that's on the way to other places. Moses had mementos. He lingered in the desert, they were commandments, rules for living, God to worship, the road trip to nowhere may lead somewhere but we have to know that our arriving is no different than our traveling. Life, it's about leaving home, it's about never arriving.

Finally, it's about whom we meet along the way. It's the road trip to Emmaus. I think one of the absolute geniuses and greatest pieces of wisdom that Christianity has to offer, is that we are never sure the stranger on the road isn't Jesus. Never sure. The disciples met a stranger, it was Jesus, the stranger on the road. The stranger on the road could be the savior of the world. The stranger that we meet could be the one who saves us from ourselves. You never know. And if you think you know, you never know for sure. He is the founder of our faith. But you see the point is, it didn't end with him. The road to Emmaus, the disciples after Easter, the stranger on the road, they didn't recognize him. Seven miles from Jerusalem, Jesus came up and walked by their side. They didn't recognize him. Then it began. And so it has continued. On the road trip to nowhere, we look for Jesus because we are Christians, and because we know we can find him.

A couple of months ago, I was in downtown Fort Collins and I made a purchase. It was a strange purchase, but I submit to you, if I could make the point, perhaps, it is deeply religious in its meaning. It's a magnetic dress-up, what would Jesus wear wardrobe. Jesus of Nazareth mix and match clothing. It has Jesus, and he can be dressed in different clothes, and can look in different ways, and so at staff meetings I'll ask one of the staff members to dress Jesus up for the day. The first attempt, we've only done this once, someone put him in a sombrero and treading pants. Now, I have to be honest and say that some of our staff members were a little squeamish about this. It seems somewhat

sacrilegious, or perhaps irreverent. I submit that it is a most religious exercise. Albert Schweitzer suggested in his book *Quest for the Historical Jesus*, I think he's absolutely right, that every generation dresses up Jesus to fit the image of the generation in which they live. And if it's true that he comes to us as a stranger, we would want to be looking for him in different clothes.

When Andre Dawson was fined a thousand dollars for disputing a strike call by umpire Joe West, the Chicago Cub baseball star sent in his check and wrote on the memo line, "donation to the blind." We want to be able to experience the presence of Jesus on the road to nowhere. So we come to see and hear Jesus in forms and voices we are not expecting. We look and we listen. Someone gave me a book written by Richard Lederer, the book is entitled *Anguished English*, it's a collection of funny signs and sayings, and how some words just don't translate into English. For example, there's a hotel swimming pool on the French Riviera, and the sign that reads, "Swimming is forbidden in the absence of a savior." I think they mean lifeguard. But we're looking for Jesus. We see him as we look. She is the waitress at Johnson's Corner who told us, "Don't eat the pot roast." She is the clerk at the Department of Motor Vehicles who called one number after another, and treated each person as if we were the only person she served, and she was glad to have served us. He was the usher who handed you the bulletin this morning when you walked in the door, and smiled as if to say "We are so glad you're here." Or the police officer who pulled you over and told you to slow down.

Gary Zukov said, "When you see with reverence, you see holiness in everything and everybody." As Christians, we seek to find Christ. The self-giving, selfless example of life lived in pure God-consciousness, motivated by love that has no strings, in something we call unconditional. It's a matter of eyes and ears, of seeing and looking and hearing, because we can, and because he's there. He's out there, and sometimes it's so obvious. Most of the time, we're not sure whom we meet on the road to nowhere. So I've tried to give some directions on the road trip to nowhere, and a suggestion, if I can say it, that there is a promised land, and you've got to leave your comfort zone, and there is an exodus, but you have to be comfortable knowing that you'll never arrive there, and there is Emmaus. On the journey, there are strangers, and some of them are Jesus. And at the end of life, at the end of all of it, it really doesn't matter how far we get, but whom we met, and how we treated them, while we traveled on the road trip to nowhere, which we call life.