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“The Journey Is...Our Home”

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Matthew 4:18-25

So many people in the Bible find themselves in transition, in between one place and another. We read of people leaving safety and security, people in the midst of great changes who are expected to rely completely upon God. It is not an easy place to be. Throughout this fall we have considered the journeys of various people in the Bible who have been on the road. We have learned about Abraham, obeying when he was called and leaving his homeland for the foreign and unfamiliar. We learned about Jacob, having stolen his brother Esau's blessing and birthright, who has to flee to an unknown place certain that he can never ever go home again. We learned of Ruth and Naomi, a mother in law and daughter in law—foreigners, widows, outcasts, who set off together to live in a community that does not really want them. And then last week we learned about Jonah, who receives a call from God to go to Nineveh and tell the Ninevites that they will be destroyed. Jonah runs from this assignment and ends up being swallowed by a whale, finding himself on a very weird journey that in the end is used by God for wonderful things.

Today we are considering the call of Jesus to the disciples. They were asked to drop what they were doing, to leave home, family, friends, all that is familiar and follow him. Doing so brought uncertainty and difficulty into their lives, and in the end it would break their hearts. Would any of them have dropped everything to follow Jesus had they known what was ahead for them? They probably thought it would be a grand adventure when he called them to drop what they were doing and follow him. But it soon became lonely and difficult. What inspired them to cast their lots with this man for a very uncertain future?

Of course this is the essential human condition, never knowing what lies ahead. Life on earth involves constant uncertainty. You know, I hate that. I do not do well with uncertainty. I want to know exactly what will be happening next and how everything is going to turn out. Once we took a family vacation with no real plan in mind. We knew the area of Colorado we wanted to explore, we were going to visit my brother in Montrose, but other than that, we did not have a definite plan. It was so stressful for me! I worried that we would not find a place to stay, that it would be horrible. It turned out to be a great vacation, but all along I knew it would be a disaster. The whole notion of limbo makes me break into a cold sweat. I long for structure, a path, a plan.

But that is not possible in so many areas of this life. We are on a journey without a road map. We will never have everything all figured out, or finally arrive at that place of contentment and happiness that we long for.

The letter to the Hebrews is a litany of the faithful—Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, Joseph, Moses. It says: “These all died in faith, **not** having received what was promised, but having seen it from afar, having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. Not one of these people, even though their lives of faith were exemplary, got their hands on what was promised.” They were on a journey, but they never arrived at their destination. And like the disciples, when they started out they had no idea what was in store for them.

I recently read about a research scientist who retired after 37 years. He spent his entire career specializing in cancer research. In 37 years he made not one significant scientific discovery. He said, “When I started out I was just out of graduate school with my Ph.D. and I was so confident and cocky! I just knew I could find a breakthrough that would bring an end to cancer. Of course it never happened. Now I am retired and I have to face that I never made that discovery.” He went on to say, “You know, I do not feel like a failure. Even though I was **not** the one to discover the breakthrough, I found hundreds and hundreds of roads that led nowhere. My research will keep others from going down those dead ends. My research will help someone else get closer to the breakthrough which will one day bring a cure for cancer. One day it is going to happen, and I will feel so proud, because I played a small part in bringing it about!” That is a wise man, who could embrace a journey that took him down hundreds of roads that led nowhere.

I officiate at far more funerals than weddings, but I was delighted to have 5 weddings this past summer and fall. And when I meet with these starry eyed couples for their pre-marital counseling sessions, I am always so touched by their high hopes and dreams. They know that they are going to have it all—a great relationship, fantastic jobs, awesome kids, a great home, enriching experiences, and all the happiness their hearts can hold. I cannot help but wonder: What sort of challenges and disappointments will they face over the years? Will all of their dreams come true or turn into nightmares? Do they have any idea of what the words sickness and health, richer or poorer, better or worse really mean? Do any of us?

Yet you cannot spend your life worrying about what will happen in the future. And so the lesson for the journey today is to trust the journey itself and make it our home. The reality of this life on earth is that we are **always** between one place and another. So we need to learn to make peace with that. And it is the reality of the church, as well. Moving, changing, giving away our resources, our talents, ourselves, expanding beyond our walls to help and heal a hurting world. The church should always be on the road, learning, serving, growing, changing. If the church of Jesus Christ is stable, secure, and content it is already dead.

I like to swim when I have the time, because it is not only great exercise, it is a chance for me to be totally in the moment and not thinking about what is next on my list of things to do. But the worst part of swimming, whether it is August or February, is getting into that water. No matter what the temperature of the water, it always feels like a frozen lake in Minnesota to me. The only way I can handle it is to jump right in, otherwise it will take me an hour to first put in my big toe, then my next biggest toe, etc. But once I do jump in, before long I stop shivering and learn that I can trust the water. I know that the water will hold me and surround me, and that is a wonderful feeling. It is so much like faith. The point of faith is jumping in and trusting that God is surrounding and sustaining us all the time, whether we realize it or not, and whether things go well for us or not. God is there during times of deep distress and great delight, through friends who support us and the wisdom that guides us. Sometimes you realize God's presence only after the surgery is over, the job secured, the move made, or the dilemma resolved. But God is holding and surrounding you all the while.

So when Jesus calls the disciples to follow him, it is like asking them to jump into a cold lake in the middle of winter; asking them to trust in the uncertain and unfamiliar. But at least Jesus does tell them what he wants them to do—become fishers of human beings. He knows that redemption is found in relationship and he expects them to form lasting relationships with all who stand in need of God's mercy, forgiveness, grace. His invitation to follow him includes an expectation of them. He expects them to reach out to others. For Jesus called people to follow him not out of a desire to add to his entourage, but out of a desire to create true community.

Dorothy Day was a fascinating woman who answered the call to follow Christ. She made a slow and painful journey of faith and for Dorothy Day Christ was made visible in the poor and despised and broken hearted. She created houses of hospitality all over the country to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless. In her autobiography *The Long Loneliness*, published in 1952, she quotes Dostoevsky by saying: "Hell Is Not to Love Anymore." She writes, "We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community." (P. 286)

When Jesus called the disciples to become fishers of women and men he was calling them to community. Asking them to be invitational, to reach out beyond their familiar comfort zones. To seek and save the lost, the broken, the forgotten and offer them abundant and eternal life.

The past 6 weeks we have examined the journeys of various Biblical characters, and in light of their experience we have considered the ways in which all of our life journeys are required, surprising, transforming, shared and weird. But ultimately, we come to the understanding that meaning is found in the journey itself. It is not a trip with a destination at the end; it is what life is all about. It will never end, even after we die, because the journey itself is our home.

Awhile back when I volunteered for our ministry to homeless families at the Wheat Ridge United Methodist Church. I met a woman named Loretta, who was a single mother of two toddlers. She left her abusive husband and had nowhere to go, and was so thankful for this wonderful ministry. I was there hosting the families while the parents got off work and got ready for dinner, and when Loretta and her children came into the room where dinner would be served, I watched as one of Loretta's sons, Deshan ran around the room like a dervish. He opened cupboards, and ran from one end of the room to another, all the while asking: "Is this home? Mommy, is this home?"

Loretta simply did not have the heart to say no. So she said, "Yes, honey, for now this is home." And in some sense it's true for us all. This strange and sacred journey is indeed our home.

Amen.