

Road Tripping With God

Amy Strader - July 19, 2009

I love road trips. I love figuring out which highways and roads to take. I love deciding which books to read when I'm not driving, which when I am with my spouse, Eric, is most of the time. I love making sandwiches for the cooler and packing up snacks. I love just sitting and looking out the window. Much to Eric's dismay, I love talking to people in gas stations and rest stops.

Born and raised in Kansas, I even love driving on I-70 through the "flat lands." I love passing the golden wheat fields, the cows grazing, being able to see for miles and miles. I especially love passing the golden wheat fields, the cows grazing, and being able to see for miles and miles. And finally, I love the excitement of pulling into the driveway or parking lot of the final destination and exclaiming, "we're here."

Summer is a good time for road trips. Perhaps some of you have been on one this summer already; maybe others have one coming up. Later in August Eric and I will be road-tripping as we travel to Las Vegas for our vacation. Maybe there are some of you who loathe road trips and that is fine too. For me though road trips are as much about the journey as they are about the destination. Road trips help me to slow down, force me to open my eyes, but I think they do much more, I think they provide us with a metaphor. A way we should view our relationship with God. I think they give us insight into the meaning of holy.

Will you pray with me....

Loving God-in this precious hour, we pause and gather to hear your word- to do so, we break from our responsibilities; we move from our fears. Free us in these moments from every distraction that we may focus to listen, that we may hear, that we may be changed. Amen

Our Old Testament scripture seems to support that God loves road trips too! Before we can discover the wisdom today's II Samuel text has to offer we must first go back to the Israelites as they traveled through the wildness. In order to understand David's desire to build God a house we must go back to the exodus.

The book of Exodus tells the great story of God's people as they are led out of slavery and into the land God promised them. In the midst of their journey, God instructs the people to prepare a few things to take on the road with them, among them, the Tabernacle.

You can picture the Tabernacle like a tent, the most ornate and elaborate tent you have ever seen, but none the less a tent. The Tabernacle is where God will "dwell" with them as they travel. Each time the weary travelers stop for the night they would delicately set up God's holy tent. They were a traveling people and they took the holy with them, they road-tripped with God.

The Israelites eventually made it to the Promised Land, but the journey was far from over. For about the next 500 years they continued to struggle, fighting to worship only one God, and not heading the advice of the prophets and judges God had sent. They cry out for leadership and a kingdom was born. Some kings are good and fair rulers, others are deceitful and full of malice.

Even with moral problems of his own, King David stands out as the favorite ruler. David is able to overcome the Philistines and then battle for Jerusalem, making it the capital city. It makes sense then that the Tabernacle, God's tent, would be set up here, in Jerusalem, making the city a holy place and for now, God's more permanent dwelling place.

Well, how was that for a tour of about 8 books of the Bible? We have finally made our way back to today's II Samuel text. It tells us that after all of King David's victories he has been provided a beautiful palace and is upset that God is living outside in a tent. Nathan, a court prophet agrees, yet that night God tells Nathan that he does not want a house, more or less saying, "I have never lived in a house and I don't want one now."

You may or may not know that one of David's descendant; Solomon did later go on to build God a home, the Temple in Jerusalem. Throughout the last years before Jesus came to Earth the Temple was destroyed by the Israelites enemies, built back up again, destroyed and rebuilt, but would eventually be left as the ruins of a great people. Many religious leaders believed that in order to pray and truly worship God you were required to go to The Temple. God lived there and no where else. They were not a traveling people; sure they took road trips to the Temple to visit God, but God no longer road tripped along side of them.

The Temple, God's house, certainly had its role in the formation of God's people. It solidified customs and gave people a place to escape the temptations to worship other gods but I want my God to live in a tent. I want to be able to take God with me when I go. I like thinking about God speaking to Nathan, "I have never had a house. I traveled with the people. Where they were, there I was also."

I have recently become fond of little known folk artist named Peter Mayer. His website says, "Peter Mayer writes songs for a small planet—songs about interconnectedness and the human journey; about the beauty and the mystery of the world." I enjoy and relate to several of his songs, but one of my favorites is entitled "Holy Now," and as I was writing today's sermon I could not seem to get the lyrics out of my head.

Hear now his poetic verses:

When I was a boy, each week
On Sunday, we would go to church
And pay attention to the priest

He would read the holy word
And consecrate the holy bread
And everyone would kneel and bow
Today the only difference is
Everything is holy now

When I was in Sunday school
We would learn about the time
Moses split the sea in two
Jesus made the water wine
And I remember feeling sad
That miracles don't happen still
But now I can't keep track
'Cause everything's a miracle

Wine from water is not so small
But an even better magic trick
Is that anything is here at all
So the challenging thing becomes
Not to look for miracles
But finding where there isn't one

When holy water was rare at best
It barely wet my fingertips
But now I have to hold my breath
Like I'm swimming in a sea of it
It used to be a world half there
Heaven's second rate hand-me-down
But I walk it with a reverent air
'Cause everything is holy now

Read a questioning child's face
And say it's not a testament
See another new morning come
And say it's not a sacrament
I tell you that it can't be done

This morning, outside I stood
And saw a little red-winged bird
Shining like a burning bush
Singing like a scripture verse
It made me want to bow my head
I remember when church let out
How things have changed since then
Everything is holy now
Everything, everything
Everything is holy now

Sometimes God traveled in a tent and the tent was holy. Other times God was found in a temple, the Temple was the holiest of holies. But today I like to think that God is everywhere, everything is holy now. I like to think that we don't just experience God at 9:00 am on Sunday morning, as the song points out the world around us a miracle that we all have access to.

I'll admit it though sometimes it is hard. As we road trip we encounter detours, wrong turns, and even horrific accidents, it doesn't always seem like everything is holy. However, as our text from Ephesians tells us, God does still have a house, we are God's house. The apostles and prophets gave us the foundation, Jesus the cornerstone.

Paul writes to the church in Ephesus reminding them that through Christ they are united as Gentiles and Jews under one roof, one body, everything is holy now. Today, we should use Christ's love to help unite us in our different opinions, different races, and sexual orientations; everything is holy now. The text tells us you and I are carefully joined together, brick by brick, our very selves becoming a holy temple, God now dwells in each one of us, and everything is holy now.

You know, now that I think of it, everyday is a road trip. We must decide the path we will take. We must determine what we will take with us. We must decide if we are going to enjoy the view or complain at every turn. We must decide if we are going to be Temple Israelites or "road-tripping" Israelites. Will we limit God's presence to one place, maybe this building perhaps? Or will we pack God up and take the spirit of hope with us. Will we see the world around us as a wild and precious moment, living as though everything is holy now? Will we unite under this roof and then take God's holy word into the world? Will you go on a road trip with God?

Prayer

Creator God-Be with us as we travel through life. Help us discern the road you would have us to take. Help us put you in the drivers seat. Give us strength during life's detours, patience when we encounter construction. Help us know your presence when we feel like we can't even put the car in drive. We ask that you be with those this day that do not feel your love and they journey down life's winding roads, help us help them see that you can be their map. Help us to be more compassionate and forgiving to those that share life's roads. Remind us to take you with us as we go and to always pray as Jesus the Christ taught: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...

Benediction

Don't leave God here in this place, open your eyes and your heart that you might see sometime shining like a burning bush or singing like a scripture verse. Take God with you as you go, be God's house, because everything is holy now, everything, everything, everything is holy now.