

Sermon for May 2, 2021

“Life’s Journey”

Life is often seen as a journey, a road that we travel. As we go, we are joined by others. Some are with us for a little while; others longer. The journey has a variety of twists and turns. There are stops and starts and new directions. There are scary parts and joyful parts. There are parts that take us right through the valley of the shadow of death and parts that lead to places completely unexpected, unimagined. The journey just continues, and we keep going, and others go along with us, helping us find our way.

Sometimes people will engage a counselor or therapist to join them for a part of their journey that is especially difficult because of grief or loss or sadness or separation. When that aspect of the journey is over, the counselor may step aside, while we continue on.

Many people find comfort and strength through the service of hospice. For an individual nearing death or for a family watching a loved one die, hospice can be of great help. Hospice workers become companions for the journey. The companionship is usually not for a long time, but it is for a crucial time.

Congregations travel a journey through the years. Along the way people join, while others go in different directions. Babies are baptized. Children grow. Students graduate. Couples marry. People move in. People move out. People drift. People die. Pastors come and go. Culture shifts. Conditions change. The church becomes an all-virtual operation. Yet the journey of the congregation continues.

In some ways, life is one big road trip. We gain much from those who travel with us, for however long it is that we walk together. This week’s lesson from Acts continues that theme. It’s the story of a road trip. The Ethiopian eunuch bounces along in his

chariot, reading from Isaiah. One can only wonder what has brought him to this place and time. The Spirit works it out so that the eunuch is joined along the way by Philip. They travel together and there is time for conversation. The topic is Scripture, particularly the words of Isaiah: "Like a sheep He was led to the slaughter, so He does not open His mouth." Philip and the eunuch discuss this passage as they travel together.

As the journey unfolds, Philip connects this passage from Isaiah with the story of Jesus; and the eunuch comes to understand what the passage means. Traveling with Philip, the eunuch moves from knowing nothing really about Jesus to receiving the gift of faith and being baptized. It is quite a journey they make together. Then Philip vanishes, led by the Spirit to go on to a new place. He and the eunuch are companions for only a short-time, but a crucial one.

The journey the eunuch makes, his growth in understanding this passage through the presence of Philip and their travels together, has much to say to us. As our journey unfolds, we come to new understandings of what Scripture means and we see more clearly the power and promise of the Gospel. Such in the case for the PCUSA. In the course of traveling through the decades together, the church has expanded its understanding of ordination, eliminating previous barriers of gender and then, more recently barriers related to sexual orientation. Similarly, the church has come to expand its definition of marriage beyond a relationship of a man and a woman, to include any two people seeking to commit themselves to one another in love.

In the company of one another and with the companionship of the Spirit, our journey has led to a new place. That happens and has happened time and time again in our life together as Presbyterians. We change, we grow, we learn. The Spirit leads us to new understandings of Scripture as we view it "through the lens of the redeeming life and ministry of Jesus Christ." As Jack Rogers put it in his work: "Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality:" "The Holy Spirit has led us to new places because that's what God

does. From the beginning, God is about creation, about bringing forth new things. Our life with Scripture is a journey and is still going on. All of us are traveling. The whole church is still traveling.”

In her work: “Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope.,” Joan Chittister makes the point: “The God who made this world, blessed it with good things, yes- - but all of them take working at: coconuts need to be cracked, soil needs to be tilled, mountains need to be climbed, water needs to be conserved. God does not do this for us. God simply companions us as we go. God has given us in this unfinished world a glimpse of eternity and walks with us through here to there.

As the eunuch reads Scripture in his chariot, he asks: “How can I understand unless someone guides me?” While Philip gets in the chariot with him, it is really the Spirit providing the guidance the eunuch seeks. The Spirit, working through his traveling companion Philip, does the teaching, creates the faith and leads the eunuch to his baptism. The eunuch is open to that direction and his journey goes on in a way he could never have imagined, taking him to the water of baptism, the water of faith, the water of promise.

We are all on a journey. God goes with us on the way. Oftentimes God is with us through the presence of those who accompany us on the road, even if they are with us for just a little while. May we be open to what we can learn from one another, so that we might be open to God who is always on the move.

Amen and Amen!