

Yes, my generation is undoubtedly spoiled in a variety of ways, including not fully appreciating the feeling behind a portion of the Gospel reading: what it means to be physically lost. At least, on the bare surface in terms of geography, we have our ways of finding out exactly where we are at any given moment. Now, I can faintly remember the good 'ole days, as some would call it, when the pocket on the backside of the passenger's seat in our family station-wagon was almost splitting apart, having to hold the massive girth of what was, basically, an atlas of all planet Earth, in case my family ever decided to travel to South America, on the spot or something, forgetting the fact that my father's idea of a vacation was going an hour southeast to Columbus. So, actually, all we really needed for our miniscule travel itinerary was the map of Ohio in the glovebox.

As for my grandfather, I remember the nights before our slightly longer road trips, together, when he would plot out road by road how we would reach our destination through his book of maps of all the states. Then, by my middle school years, the Internet started to change the entire travel preparation process forever, when a thing called MapQuest

came along, and you could just print out a detailed turn-by-turn instruction with distances in between and how long it should take you to get to wherever you would be going.

So, I remember having to print off those directions before making the drive to college the first day of orientation, with my mom following behind. One missed turn could bring in its own reality of feeling lost, for sure, driving into rather foreign territory, for us, at least, on the west end of the state on US-68 through West Liberty and Urbana, Ohio. And yet, no matter how scary that might feel, whether it happened in the good ‘ole paper map days or today with GPSes and Google Maps on our cell phones, I like to think the Gospel digs much, much deeper than that.

Because, the truth is, when I felt most lost that day, was after we had arrived and all the stuff was moved in over I don’t even want to think about how many flights of stairs that horrendously hot day; and as my mom walked out back to her car and I, in turn, walked down the hallway into some required residential hall meeting: *that* is when I felt lost. I knew exactly where I was on any device or piece of paper, but I wasn’t quite sure where I was in life, at that point. This was the first

significant time away from home, away from the close group of friends developed over the life-shaping adolescent years. There were no familiar faces in that room anymore: no comforting assurance, no relational promises to be there for you at the end of the day. I didn't know if this was, actually, going to work. I really wasn't sure if my major was going to be what I wanted. I just felt lost.

Thankfully, the professors were exceptional, the classes were interesting, yes, and obviously, by far the most important: the dining hall was only a few hundred yards away. I didn't need a map for that most essential place. But, the most vivid memory I have was walking in the chapel on top of the hill on campus, and there was this odd combination of still feeling lost, walking up the center aisle, and yet, feeling right at home, as I made it toward the front for the chapel choir's first rehearsal of the year. There was a bit of home-feeling with that, not just because it was something I did at my home congregation, but a bit of spiritual home feeling, as if God was right there all along.

I like to think the true power of the Gospel that we ultimately cling to on whatever path we find ourselves in this life, is that with God, we

are never lost from our Lord. After all, we boldly proclaim, we desperately cling to the Great News that absolutely nothing in this life can separate us from God's full-fledged all-in-on-us loving-divine-self. The Gospel is not that God stays in one place, in some church building on the top of a hill, or in some temple in Jerusalem, and if we don't come to that specific spot enough, or when God thinks we're so lost in this life because we don't show up enough on Sundays or we've strayed off the holy path altogether because of all we did during the week; that God is going to come off the almighty heavenly throne to begrudgingly look for us and bring us back immediately for our own eternal salvation good.

Instead, the Gospel is that God has made a promise to stick beside us wherever we go. God's love is not conditioned on certain places or certain right decisions made or making sure we plot out the exact right course to stay on some perfect, picked out just for us, road to the Heavenly kingdom. God has already found us from the beginning, and there is absolutely nothing we can do, no where we can go, to leave the

very love that has already saved us and grabbed a hold of us with the tightest and ease-filled embrace imaginable.

Granted, that doesn't mean we won't have our days of feeling lost, or finding ourselves in the middle of nowhere, but that doesn't mean God made a decision to ever leave us along the way. God's love doesn't operate that way. After all, there will never be a time when we have to wait around for God to find us. God already did, because when this Risen Lord of ours walked out of the tomb, He got on the path that lead into very depths of our soul. And the Promise remains: He is never, ever going to leave that sacred spot within us, within our life that God still says is worth dying for again and again. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God indeed! Amen.