



*What would happen if – at every junction, every journey, every life event. . .even every day – we would remind ourselves of that truth? What would happen if we had a GPS – a “God Provides System” which anchors us?*

This past week, my husband and I travelled nearly 2,000 miles. Leaving from Wisconsin, we stopped for a couple of days in Omaha to visit my mother. After that, we went to Denver (for my granddaughter’s bridal shower) and onto Buena Vista for her wedding.

We stayed in a beautiful log cabin in the mountains about a half an hour from the wedding venue and went back and forth several times; and on the morning of the wedding, we went up to the continental divide at Cottonwood Pass.

Then, of course, we came home.

It was an amazing road trip. I marveled at the change in topography – from the forests in Wisconsin, the miles and miles of rolling and flat plains of Iowa and Nebraska and into the mountains. From sea level to 10,000 feet.

Google Maps guided us all the way.

Do you remember what it was like to travel before we had GPS to help us? We might have had a Trip Tic from AAA, or a big map (which we folded and unfolded until the seams split). But sometimes we lost our way – and had to pull over to get directions. Not with Google Maps – which “reroutes” our mistakes and gets us back on track.

And here’s the good part – Google Maps tells you about construction and back-ups along the way. This is a great feature, allowing you to detour and avoid the mess!

When Jesus sent the disciples out, two by two, he didn't want them to use Google Maps. He told them not to take an extra set of sandals, or two tunics "Just in case." At first, it sounds as if he was being irresponsible. Why wouldn't he want them to be prepared? An extra tunic was a good thing to have, in case they had to sleep outside at night. And, like tires, sandals wear out.

You might be confused at Jesus' instructions if you didn't know what his real intent was for them: It's not about the destination, it's about the journey. It's not about avoiding difficult situations or circumventing them. It's about heading right into them. It's not about finding the path of least resistance but understanding that difficulty is the very seed bed of mission.

Ezekiel is told to "stand up" and face the wayward Israelites, an impudent and stubborn people. Jesus is flatly rejected in his hometown and tells his disciples to expect the same treatment. Both texts speak to us – and our resistance to face the difficulties of mission.

We'd rather have tunics and sandals, thank you very much. We want to have the smoothest possible mission route ahead, and not "waste our time" with out of the way places and people who don't want us.

We want to have a Google Map out of danger which helps us to avoid suffering. We want a glorious vision of where we are headed – like the Apostle Paul who was caught up in a "third heaven" which zoomed him out to the bigger picture.

But Paul knew the pitfall of trying to rely on that kind of GPS - especially when we think we can control our circumstances or avoid rough roads. It is why Jesus' hometown is having trouble seeing the forest for the trees; and why Jesus' deeds of power are restricted. Instead, he says: "God's grace is sufficient."

What would happen if – at every junction, every journey, every life event. . .even every day – we would remind ourselves of that truth? What would happen if we had a GPS – a "God Provides System" which anchors us?

A God Provides System isn't just for us, so that we relax along the way. It's a way of life which allows Grace and healing in ourselves and others to occur – even and especially as we face the challenges and detours of life. A God Provides System allows us to move into mission – knowing that Grace is sufficient in all things. And God has us in loving arms; even when we are lost, we are "found" by the one who accompanies us in life.

And even more, this God Provides System allows us to participate in the healing of others, which is our true mission. If we are not so worried about our own destinations, we will be able to accompany others on theirs, being part of how God provides for them.

Years ago, I was in an outpatient treatment program in Minneapolis for families of alcoholics. Each of us were put into small groups which met each week, where we would share our work with the twelve steps – and the group would finally “pass” us. I figured that I would breeze through each step (being the intelligent person I am).

But after several weeks of “failing” my first step – which is simply to admit my life was out of control - I was desperate. In utter frustration, I said: “I give up! I don’t know how to do this!” To my utter astonishment, everyone in my group passed me that day. They knew that I was finally able to switch from “Molly’s Google Map” to God’s GPS. To be honest, that wasn’t the only time I’ve had to make the switch. I still do it, every day. (Sometimes more successfully than others.)

It may seem as if the church is “lost” or out of control today. Many congregations are worried about sustainability after pandemic. People worry about the implications of virtual worship, which has taken off during quarantine. Often, it’s easier to imagine ourselves going back to what we have known rather than learn to trust God to lead the way ahead. But our mission is God’s mission (or it should be) and we can trust that his GPS will lead us, provide for us and give us direction for a new church.

Amen.