

On the Road Again

Luke 24:13-35

April 26, 2020

I have to apologize to Willi Nelson, because I have entitled today's sermon/meditation – *On the road again*. When our children were young, each summer we would pack up our VW camper heading for adventures in various parts of Canada; from the red sands of Prince Edward Island to the Pacific Rim National Park on the Island. Each and every year we left, we began our trip listening to that song of Willi's and each morning while away, that's how the day began.

We drove across this wide and beautiful country. We drove, but today, not too many people are travelling very far. If anything, people are walking more, biking more, but definitely not flying any place.

Has the increased number of people walking changed from what it was 5 months ago? Do you remember what it was like 5 months ago? Have the walking habits of people changed? I don't think that they have changed much in Vancouver. Watch the people walking on the street and you'll see what I mean. Often, they have a cell phone pressed to their ear or in their hands, across which they're moving their fingers to post or tweet. Walking for the sake of walking is a lost art, another thing we do while we are "Getting Things Done".

Walking may seem arcane in our modern society with all its modes of transportation, even among those who still walk, many have forgotten how to really walk. But I know when I walk, the seawall in Vancouver or the Wild Pacific Trail on the island, I try to listen for the honking of the Canada Geese or watch the trees as they travel through their seasons.

Jesus understood that walking could be a holy practice. Walking is something he did a lot in his lifetime. Jesus could have chosen to ride. He had his disciples fetch a donkey for him that one time, and I'm sure some of his followers would have gladly donated a nice horse to their teacher and mentor. But Jesus preferred to feel the ground with his feet, to deal with the dust and the occasional stone in his sandal. It kept him connected to the earth, connected to the holy and everyone around him. It slowed his pace, allowing him to see things: sparrows, a beggar beside a road, trees, a leper beside a fountain, plants, and perhaps even a glimpse of the holy itself.

If he had chosen to ride, the world around him would just be a blur. He'd be above it all, lording his power over people. But that's not how Jesus lived - and it's not how he encourages us to live. Instead, he challenges us to stroll through our lives, enjoy each moment of the journey, and notice the holy moving in, through and around us at every moment.

Ah, but like those disciples on the road to Emmaus, we forget. They didn't have cell phones to distract them from their walk, but they sure had a lot on their minds. Their leader, Jesus, had been arrested, tried, and executed just days earlier. They had heard the women's tale of an empty tomb. And now they journeyed to another town. We're not told why. Perhaps they just needed to get away, to think, to be somewhere that didn't hold such painful memories. And so, they walked.

A stranger came and walked alongside them Luke tells us. They tell the stranger about Jesus: his wonderful works, his death, words of an empty tomb. Yet all the while, they don't realize that the man they're talking about is journeying with them.

This is how our own cares and concerns can blind us to the presence of the holy in our midst. Our minds and hearts overloaded by all the busyness around and within: we walk but we don't see. We move forward but we miss the scenery - and the holy - that is surrounding us.

Jesus invites us to open our eyes, because the holy journeys beside us all the time. We're all on a journey - every single one of us. Some of us, like the disciples in our reading, are on journeys of despair. Some of us are journeying in joy. Some of us are

journeying in confusion. Some of us are journeying in boredom. Many of us maybe experiencing many of these feelings because of our present situation. But no matter what your current journey, the holy walks with you, often in disguise; opening up the world to you; giving you new insights, new ideas, new ways of being and living in this world, if only we'd all pay closer attention.

When those disciples reached Emmaus, they invited the stranger to have dinner with them. They were so enamored with their guest they could not fathom parting with him. Jesus agreed. And when he broke bread with them, they suddenly recognized him.

Isn't that always the way? It's easier to see the holy in familiar rituals, especially those at tables. Whether it's a formal communion celebration or friends and family sharing a meal, it can be easy to sense the holy in those moments of laughter and conversation around the table.

The holy may seem hidden or disguised when we are away from such remembrance-laden settings. But, Jesus challenges us to open our eyes and experience the wonder of each step of our journey. Instead of traveling so fast that it all becomes a blur,

Jesus invites us to slow down, to make the destination secondary, and be open to the journey itself as a holy encounter.

Today, April, 2020 gives us the opportunity to slow down, walk and not be rushed. Experience the wonder of God's creation as we journey through this time of social isolation, as we stay safe and healthy and as we deal with this nasty virus.

But, the story isn't over. Just as the disciples recognized Jesus at the table, he vanishes. Poof!

Isn't that always the way? Whenever we get to see the holy in its full form, it seems to vanish just as we recognize it. Sacred experiences are not made to be possessed and captured, like curios in a display cabinet. Rather, sacred encounters of the holy are meant to surprise us, to keep our hearts and minds open to the ways and ones by which they come to us.

For the truth is, we are always on the road to Emmaus. One day Jesus may be with us on the road in the disguise of a homeless person, teaching us compassion; or a child, teaching us patience; or a dying friend, teaching us about our own fragile time here on earth. One day the presence of the holy may come in a brilliant red cardinal or an unexpected flower on the path, reminding you of the breathtaking beauty of this blessed creation. One day the presence of the holy may come in a breeze

blowing through your hair, reminding you to take a refreshing break. One day, the presence of the holy may come in one with whom you are in conflict, reminding you that you still have a lot to learn about yourself and community.

There's a reason the early Christians were called *People of the Way*. They knew they were on a journey. They knew, and they have shown us, that the Holy Spirit leads us daily on a journey to God where disappointed hopes are interrupted by the recognition that the holy walks by our side. And when we recognize this holy companionship on the way, we allow God to breathe life into our despair and hope upon our way.

May our eyes be opened to the one who travels with us - and may we know it's good to be on the road again.