



We are each on a journey. In fact, we are on multiple journeys at the same time although we may not always call what we are doing a journey. Here's an example of something you might not at first think of as a journey: Law school is a journey of three years. The saying goes that the first year they scare you to death, the second year they work you to

death and the third year they bore you to death. As with much folk wisdom, there is a lot of truth in that saying.

The last several Sundays in Epiphany we watched "Sacred Journeys" and learned about pilgrimages in various places around the globe. Journeys in search of the sacred and in search of self. Journeys with hopes and dreams of knowing yourself better and of perhaps understanding your faith deeper. Different sacred journeys and yet many similarities. The ages of those who took those sacred journeys varied from two medical students who were on a quest before resuming their lives as doctors to retired people who had questions that they now could take the time to explore in depth. Thanks for Jeremy and Jill for facilitating those discussions.

Today we have more journeys. We begin in Genesis with Abram. God calls and Abram goes. No fuss – just picks up and goes. Now it may be because God had laid before Abram that God would bless Abram, make his name great and that God would curse those who cursed Abram. Perhaps that's enough of a carrot that Abram said, "ok, I can do this if that's what's at the end of this journey." Whatever Abram's thinking was, he didn't argue with God. Abram didn't plead that someone else be sent.

That's quite different from what we see with others. Moses begs and pleads with God to call someone else. "Who am I that you should send me" Moses asks God. "Who are you" that the people should believe me when I say I come from God comes next. And, "I stutter" is among the reasons Moses gives for why it would be better to send someone else. God answers that by reminding Moses that God will provide Moses with the words to speak and if necessary, Aaron, his brother, will speak for Moses when need be. Whatever objections Moses raises, God responds until Moses finally gives in and becomes the Lord's prophet.

Isaiah complains to God that he is a man of unclean lips so he can't possibly be the Lord's messenger. God takes care of that quickly! God sends a seraph holding a live coal taken from the altar with a pair of tongs, holds that live coal to Isaiah's lips and says": now, you have no more excuses. Go!

Continuing in the tradition of wanting no part of being God's messenger, Jeremiah complains that "Truly I do not know how to speak for I am only a boy." God responds in similar fashion to Isaiah when "The Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth and said to Jeremiah: "Now I have put my words in your mouth."

It's dangerous business to deny what the Lord calls us to be and to do. But not every call from God is answered by getting up and going right away. In our faith tradition, it is more likely than more of us come to faith through a journey rather than in one blinding moment. I suspect many

Genesis 12: 1-4; Psalm 121; Romans 4: 1-5, 13-17; John 3: 1-17

of us have felt a pull or a push to do this or that but aren't quite sure which of the choices is the right one. So we sleep on it – and sometimes in the morning the choice is clear. We have allowed our mind time to process the pros and the cons and perhaps even to compare the choices against our Gospel values. That still small voice of God works on our unconscious until we pick up our staff and go.

This is not to say that either approach – one singular moment or a journey over time – is better than the other. Rather, that whatever the journey: a moment or a long period of time – the journey, the deepening of faith is what matters. The responding to God's call is what matters.

Nicodemus is one who needed time, space and perhaps more experience of Jesus to come to faith in Jesus as the Messiah than is captured in the Gospel according to John. We learn of Nicodemus in chapter 3 of John but then do not see him again until chapter 7 when Jesus is teaching in the temple and the authorities want to arrest him and then finally in chapter 19 after Jesus is crucified when Nicodemus brings spices in which to wrap the body. It is Nicodemus who reminds the temple police that "Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing." Thus, Nicodemus has gone from coming to Jesus at night because he is afraid of what others would say to speaking out before the temple police and other authorities to remind them of due process. And in the end, it is Nicodemus who brings costly spices in order that Jesus might have a burial of grace and dignity. A journey of questions. A journey that includes speaking out. A journey that grieves the hopes and dreams that appear to have been dashed into nothingness.

Our life journeys will often include some times when we want to explore, quietly and perhaps even in secret, what faith is, who we understand God to be, and listen for the call of God on our life. Our journey may call us to speak out against injustice and misunderstanding as we strive to live a life that God will call righteous. Abram was called righteous because he followed God.

For many, it is not easy to pick up and move. It is not always easy to change from what you were doing to earn a living to another profession that more closely aligns with our Gospel values. God sometimes says "no" to our hopes and dreams and we can feel adrift as we search for new ways of being without those hopes and dreams that were so central to our life.

Journeys, at least for me, have often included rabbit trails- something catches your eye and you move off the path you had set for yourself. Just for a bit, let me check this out, oh that's interesting. And even Moses had to step off the path when the burning bush appeared. But when Moses and God had conversed, Moses got back on the path albeit with a new focus and a new journey before him.

Even when we are not sure where we are going, we can rest assured that "The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in, from this time forth for evermore." It is the Lord who "shall preserve [us] from all evil and it is he who shall keep [us] safe." Take the journey that God has placed before you. Know the Lord himself watches over you and your help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. Amen.