



For those of us who are Type A, when we travel it's all about getting from Point A to Point B – and do not stop in between unless that's already been calculated into the day's itinerary. For those who are Type B's, it's usually more about what's between Point A and Point B – an attitude of “we'll get there, eventually. Let's not miss what's in between.” This attitude tends to be true whether we're on a physical, an intellectual or a spiritual journey. Although, “the wind blows where it will and you do not know from whence it came or where it is going.” The “best laid plans oft go a-glee” to paraphrase Robby Burns. So even though we Type A's like to plan, to be organized, can get impatient with detours or delays, sometimes there simply is nothing to do but go along and have faith that, at the end of the day, we'll end up where we planned to be.

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.

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. Do you remember how 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.

Or do you remember when God called Isaiah to be a 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

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

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 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.

This is true for those of us raised in the church, who can’t remember a time without God in our lives. It wasn’t a choice- it just was and is. But we, too, periodically, go on journeys. What has seemed settled may suddenly not seem so settled. We grow and we ask questions. Many of us raised in the church since a very young age come to a time, often in college, when we begin to question. Or we begin to question when something in our life goes awry from what we thought – might be an illness, death of a parent or spouse, or something that doesn’t fit our itinerary.

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

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

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.”

This Lent we are once again on the journey to Calvary and the crucifixion. We are on the journey to those you trust most, the disciples, being the ones who first betray Jesus and then leave him alone on the cross because they are afraid. We are also on the journey to the resurrection. To the hope that the one we follow, Jesus Christ, is indeed the one in who we have faith and the hope of eternal life.

We may not always see the road clearly. We may not always take the correct turn. That’s one reason the prayer written by Thomas Merton has made such an impression on so many of us. Merton wrote:

My Lord God,
 I have no idea where I am going.
 I do not see the road ahead of me.
 I cannot know for certain where it will end.
 nor do I really know myself,
 and the fact that I think I am following your will
 does not mean that I am actually doing so.
 But I believe that the desire to please you
 does in fact please you.
 And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
 I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
 And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
 though I may know nothing about it.
 Therefore will I trust you always though
 I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
 I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
 and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.¹

And from Numbers we have the blessing that brings great comfort:

The LORD bless you and keep you;
 the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
 the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. (Numbers 6:24-26)

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.

¹ Seize the Day: Vocation, Calling, Work, 2012