

"Life's Journey"

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July 8, 2018

Each Sunday, a deacon reads our invitation to worship, "... No matter who you are, or where you are in life's journey, you are welcome here."

This morning, let us consider life's journey.

God laid the paving stones for the path of each of our lives. Jesus teaches the rules of the road. This divine duo provides roadside service for our needs, big and small. They are the roadmaps or GPSs to keep us from getting lost in evil or temptation. The Holy Spirit accompanies us on our journey, giving us the courage and wisdom to stay the course until we reach our heavenly home.

When one prepares for a trip, chances are, one makes a list. Given the nature of life, we cannot make a list prior to our living journey; ^{but} each of us present today is blessed with one or more decade of experience, which creates perspective and clues to what should be on that list of the journey's necessities. Each decade of life brings further knowledge, learned through all the people in our lives and even our mistakes and hardships. Hence the expression, "With age comes wisdom."

The scriptures we heard this morning point to three watchwords for our life lists:

- Trust in God
- Pray with an open mind
- Learn from the teachings of Jesus.

Luke shares Jesus' parable about the lilies and how they grow; it is a lovely lesson about how we can trust in God. God creates the lilies; they do not have to work, work, work to attain their beauty - God provides it.

Grass, which is often harvested during its natural lifespan, is green, beautiful, and useful as food for many creatures. Longevity is not a requirement for God's love. God knows we all have needs for survival. Jesus assures us that God will provide.

When events prove to be out of our control, we can feel helpless or frustrated; we may even blame ourselves for lack of foresight. Some people may be more susceptible to such potholes in the road because they are very capable and have relied on themselves to persevere and succeed. When that personal control of life is taken away, by illness for example, even the most competent leader or professional can feel blind-sided and powerless. By trusting God to tend to what is most needed in our lives, we relieve ourselves of blame, burden, and angst about the future.

The lilies, the grass... all of nature is proof of God's constant care.

Do not worry - Trust. Transform your energy from anxiousness to zeal. Push forward on your journey with enthusiasm!

In the book of Mark, Jesus tells us how our faith and prayer can move mountains into the sea. "Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it, and you will." Our acceptance needs to be part of this assurance... Pray with an open mind and heart, acknowledging that God's will be done. How can we know what is best for us? We are mere mortals. We must trust that God will answer our prayer; ^{however,} we may need to consider and interpret the direction God is pointing. Perhaps you may need to revisit your prayer request from different viewpoints. Take time in a quiet place to ponder; wait as long as it takes to sense God's guidance. Listen for God's still, small voice.

Few people are lucky enough to have "the earth move under their feet." Prayer and recognizing God's response are acts of faith and trust. One can accept answers to prayer in all forms and realize that God is answering according to a higher power and an infinite wisdom that we cannot possibly fathom.

Jesus reminds us, too, that part of the process of prayer is that we must forgive anything we hold against anyone. Forgiving others must be on our Journey's List. Like fresh air, it creates a healthy and clear mind. We also ask God to forgive us, hopefully because we have discovered our transgressions and want to avoid repeating them. With forgiveness, we are no longer lost. Remember to first forgive others... the Key to answered prayer and a lighter-hearted journey.

Matthew tells the story of Jesus being tested by a lawyer as to which commandment is the greatest in the law. Here, Jesus answers with the whole basis of his preaching and the chief tenet for us to follow as Christians: Love. Jesus is our teacher, by word and by example. To learn, we have to read Jesus' words, listen to helpful interpretations, and try to understand how his stories relate to our lives. Then, we can act as Jesus would wish, using our own unique gifts.

Jesus is not always easy to comprehend; he said that he taught in parables, or parallel stories, in order to fulfill an Old Testament prophesy of Isaiah, that many would not understand the true meaning of his teachings. Jesus said that his disciples, whose eyes and ears were blessed with the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven, would be able to understand his lessons. Here we are, in this sanctuary: Christ's disciples! We can learn Jesus' teachings and enlighten others along the journey.

Jesus gave us two new commandments to live by. First, "Love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." Love God above every other aspect of your life. Act upon the Lord's word over that of anyone who contradicts it ... your friends, your family, your boss, your temptations, your principalities. Jesus tells us simply that God is the moral compass for our journey through life.

In addition, we are to "love our neighbors as ourselves." Jesus does not mean to just love our friends and our families, and those we feel comfortable with, and those we approve of, and those we agree with. Our neighbors are just people who live nearby. In our modern world of transportation and communication, everyone is our neighbor! Love them all!

If we can remember to keep Jesus' commandments at the TOP of our list for our journey through life, our decision-making becomes easier and our souls become purer. We can become the catalysts for positivity, the hands and heart of Jesus in the world around us.

Thank you for stopping in to church for a respite on your journey! It is an oasis on the way. There are not many places you can go to build your Trust in God, Pray with an Open Mind, and Learn from the Teachings of Jesus, all in the company of friends. Nurture your spirit here awhile, then resume your journey with the Lord traveling by your side.

- Jenny Brummund