

Proper VIII Year C 2025

Travelling takes courage. Our family travelled a lot during my growing up. Before each trip we took, my Dad would sit us down and say: Remember, travelling is work... and then his favorite admonition: "Expect the unexpected;" two understatements to be sure. No matter how much one plans, no matter how thorough the itinerary, travelling always becomes improvisation. I have so many stories about our improbable adventures and misadventures, both ecstatic and terrifying experiences on our journeys, and everything in between. There are many people who won't travel... I suspect because of its uncertainty; the uncertainty of leaving home, leaving what we know, leaving our comfortable routines. I was one of those kids who wouldn't spend the night away from home... my mama called it homesickness; and even today, when we travel, I feel a twinge of that same anxiety. Travelling takes courage; and courage is a choice.

So it's entirely understandable that travelling, the journey, is a persistent motif in literature, all over the world: The Odyssey, The Aeneid... present in the works of Cervantes, Chaucer, Mark Twain, Melville, McCarthy... Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*.... A long list. The journey is an archetype, a noble metaphor for life itself. Of necessity we must have heightened awareness on the proverbial road. We must pay attention. On a journey we encounter the sacred stranger, whom we discover is so very much like us, which is to say, that the journey is a sacred process of self-discovery. Life itself is an uncertain and improvisational process toward discovery of the greater purpose; the true perspective; what really matters. If in this life we have not discovered what matters,

then we have not lived. Baptism, in the church, at its heart, is an initiation into a life that matters.

And speaking of the church, over its history it has insisted, dare I say, on an idolatrous depiction of Jesus... Jesus, a two-dimensional icon ascended apart from this world into a stoic godhead to be worshipped. But at least according to scripture, Jesus never asked to be worshipped. He taught and preached a way of life; a way of purpose and meaning; a way of life that would sow the seeds of God's gracious kingdom of equals. Jesus and the movement he engendered offers an alternative to the ways of the world, the ways of power, and the violence power begets. In a world enslaved to the false gods of social, political, and economic hierarchy; a world of insiders and outsiders; a world of abusive coercion and false scarcity, Jesus offers a way of life that embraces compassion and mercy, inclusion and equality, justice and community. A world in which there are no outcasts. That world is itself the journey, a journey ever unfolding, rife with mystery. Jesus gives us the map for the journey whereby we learn the art of living for God, bearing God's life to and for a broken world. It is a peculiar map; quite other than what the world knows. It is not set in stone. It requires imagination; improvised routes; very few shortcuts; GPS is of no use.

The literary motif of Luke's Gospel is a journey. Throughout this Gospel Jesus is moving from place to place on his way to Jerusalem, the center of Jewish life: politics, economics, social order, religion. The journey, like all journeys, is a learning experience

for his disciples and the crowds who follow... and I want to believe that it had to have been a learning experience for Jesus as well. And for us, who enter into the story, an opportunity for discovery. The map for the journey is Mary's song in the prelude to this Gospel: That along this road, the abused and shamed are seen and raised up by God; that the arrogant are scattered; that the powerful are brought down to justice; that the marginalized are given dignity; that the hungry are fed with earth's abundance... and that the excesses of the rich are stripped away. Mary's song informs the entire narrative of Luke... it is a map for the journey; a prophecy and vision for the way ahead; and a prophecy and vision for our own place and time, as we see in our own country the catastrophic abuse of power which may well destroy our democracy as we know it. This, of course, is nothing new. The way of empire has, at least since recorded history... the way of empire has always been the problem. The map calls on Jesus and his followers to go to the power source and call it to account; to speak truth up and against the powerful who own our world. Jesus says to be in the world, but not of it.... And along the way to Jerusalem there is more discovery in Luke's narrative: That non-violence, even in the face of an enemy, is the only way to live... no exceptions; that we must confront our xenophobic predispositions. Perhaps the greatest oxymoron of modern times is the "Just War." Surely we've learned that along the way. We learn that welcome and hospitality are the means of experiencing God's presence; that God is not aloof in the heavens, but in our lives. We learn on this journey, that healing is

collaborative; that it always takes place in community. Such a long road... so much to learn. So much to discover.

This alternative world, this road less travelled by, is not for the end times, nor is it for the next life, whatever that may be, nor is there a destination. This world is the journey. This new world of good will and grace and shared abundance lays its foundation among the broken shards and artifacts of our crumbling world. The kingdom of God is built upon the ruins of human endeavor; but that doesn't mean that it is lost amid the chaos of human folly. Quite the contrary. God's kingdom will ramify in ways we can't imagine. With every life dignified; with every person raised as an equal; with every suffering soul welcomed into God's beloved community, the world is transformed. Changed utterly. The truth is out, and the world trembles with possibility. As the song says: You can have all this world, just give me Jesus. The way of Jesus is the Truth and the Life. We remind ourselves of that each time we gather as God's people.

This journey matters good people. Our living for the truth; loving our neighbor. Standing against dishonesty, falsehood, and evil and abuse... matters. In our reading from Luke this morning, Jesus makes the point that the way of life he proclaims is the thing that matters most of all. The sooner we learn that in this short life, the better. It matters more than our families. It matters more than home. It is costly. It takes commitment and sacrifice, our anxiety notwithstanding. This journey uproots us from the illusion of self-sufficiency. It uproots us from the false gods that lay claim to us. It is

uncertain, dangerous, perhaps, but it brims with possibility... and freedom... true freedom. You can have all this world, just give me Jesus. Jesus the way.

Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, speaks eloquently of the choice for this journey. For those who so choose there will be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, self-control.... He calls these gifts fruit of the Spirit... and the Spirit is not only for the faithful, but for the world the faithful serve... and these fruits are manifest even amid the wrack and ruin of our world.

My brothers and sisters, this coming Friday is the Fourth of July, the day we celebrate the founding of this, our beloved country. I, and I suspect, you, are awash with ambivalence about that, given the present assault on the rule of Law. We are in a dark era of our democracy. The vision of our founders of an egalitarian society is being compromised if not destroyed. We are seeing the deadly effects of the abuse of power, and the disempowering results of unbridled Capitalism. The two are co-conspirators. Who knows what lies ahead. But I do know this. We stay on our journey. We speak the truth; we show compassion and mercy; we welcome the stranger and the immigrant. We stand against violence. We love each other, and we love our neighbor. Such is God's kingdom in its becoming. Good people, we are not just the resistance.... We are the means of healing in our world. That matters. That matters more than anything else.