

One of the joys of being the rector of St. John's, Cold Spring Harbor, is our long sponsorship of the Oyster Bay Music Festival which, like the Walden School, celebrates the work of young musicians with incredible potential. It was through that Music Festival that I recently met a young soprano with incredible talent, Teddy Siegal. Teddy clearly has a gift and I said something to her like, I look forward to hearing more from you when you are famous, to which she replied "I am already famous."

"Really," I asked, "for your singing?" "No," she replied, "for my TikTok." Now, I don't really follow TikTok, so this was a surprise to me. "Do you dance there," I asked? "No," she said, "I review public bathrooms in New York City for people who have to go to the bathroom as they travel."

Teddy, is out there answering the question, where can you go, when you don't know where to go, but you just gotta go. I mean, birds have nests, and foxes have holes, but tourists? Sometimes, they've just gotta go. You know? Well, for them, Teddy, has a plan.

When you are on a journey, one of the most important questions is where will we go? Where will we stop? Where will we stay? How long will we be on the road? It's a question I am familiar with from my own journeys, long and short. Summer had always been a time for long journeys for me- we used to travel across the country as a family each summer: Long Beach to Cape Cod and where we would stop and stay was of utmost importance to all of us. Which route we would take was also important, but this was a time before cell phone and GPS so these journeys were grand adventures. I think we will have the chance to talk more about these journeys as we travel together over this summer, but more on that later.

We would stay at campgrounds mostly and the routes became familiar and the monotony of the journey was very familiar. 7 days in the van- on the way.

In Luke's gospel, the disciples are on the way for 9 chapters. It's a long time. It's more than a long time- it's a metaphorically long time. In fact, it's the central feature of the gospel of Luke- the journey. All the important stuff in the gospel of Luke happens on the way. The parables, the miracles, the special Luke stuff all happens "on the way."

Jesus only arrives in Jerusalem at the end and all along the way he and his disciples are vulnerable: they are homeless, they are aimless, and they are on edge.

Of course, this narrative is meant to remind us of the Israelite's time of journeying- the time in the wilderness. Like them, the disciples are making a relatively short journey- it isn't far to Jerusalem, it takes between 2-3 hours by car- but their journey last 9 chapters.

It wasn't 80 years far from Egypt to the promised land either, but we know that that journey wasn't about travel to the destination, either. No, that journey was also metaphorically far. What mattered was who the Israelites were becoming as they travelled.

Both journeys, in Luke and in the Books of Moses are not about getting anywhere, but about following God and being with God, and the transformation that occurs as you do and as you are.

Now, look, I like a road trip. In fact, I may like a road trip more than many people, but I always want to know where I am going and how. I am not a wanderer. I have strong preferences for routes, I know that in almost all cases I would prefer to travel farther it means less traffic. So a route that is longer by distance, but shorter by time is almost always my preference. Life on Long Island is particularly frustrating for me in this way: we are 35 miles from the greatest city in the world, but there are 8 million people between us and there and it can take unending amounts of time to make that short trip by car.

I have preferred stops, or even better, no stops. I have preferred rest areas, preferred gas stations- my trips are all about destinations, not journeys. And, if I'm honest so is my spiritual life- I have a destination firmly in mind almost always.

One of the hardest parts of this summer for me is that I thought I was going one way this year and with my life, and, it turns out, I'm not. Now I'm not so sure where I'm going. So I resonate with the disciples. Just tell me, Jesus, where are we going? What will we do when we get there? What is the route? Where will we stop? These are familiar questions to me. What, Jesus, is the divine plan?

It turns out, the divine plan is: follow me. I am the way.

Friends, we are on a journey. A journey of life, a journey of faith and we need to get comfortable with ambiguity. It turns out the good stuff doesn't happen when you stop- the good stuff happens as you move.

This moment in time, this moment in history, this moment in our life as a community and as a nation is thoroughly ambiguous. If the last few days, weeks, and months have taught us anything it may be that we don't really know where we are.

I thought I knew who I was becoming.

I was wrong.

I thought I understood who we were as a nation. I thought some things were settled.

I was wrong.

I thought we had made it to a point of rest on important issues in our national life - our national identity with women's bodily autonomy, a pathway for stricter gun safety for our kids and our communities - nope, not true, we have more distance to travel, it turns out.

We are headed somewhere - We don't know where. This ambiguity, this vulnerability, this lack of direction, it's emotionally and spiritually exhausting to me - and maybe also for you. And I am learning, again, that, even in the midst of my personal disappointment and our national disappointment the destination is not the point. What matters, is who is with me and that I keep moving.

I have long known that I am surrounded by companions on the way dear friends, and precious family who will go anywhere with me, what a gift that is. I have also long known that I am accompanied in life by God - a God who journeys with me, but I have to keep relearning that I am not headed in one direction only, I can go anywhere, I can do anything, as long as I follow Jesus and remember that God is with me.

Just to be clear, I hate that.

I have to keep relearning that what I need is not a destination, but comfort on the way, because we are not alone. We are Moving with god and we are journeying towards God.

I have a friend and a colleague who was my predecessor at EHS and my chaplain at Summer camp, he and I are, on the face of things, very similar. But in another way, we also could not be more different. He is totally comfortable with what I would call the “no plan” plan.

I remember seeking his advice about how he understood his life and ministry - what were the important things to do, what were the milestones that marked success, and when will I know that I have done the right thing. He ended up telling me none of those things. Instead, he shared his philosophy of life - he used a fancy word - charette. He said that he took a charette approach to life.

Now, you may be familiar with the concept of a charette, it's a term used most frequently in architecture and design. In that context, it is a kind of idea contest. In an architectural charette, several architects or designers will offer suggestions about the design and use of a building - its shape and program - and the client gets to pick from this design contest anything they like. What's interesting about charettes is that the design doesn't stick with the architect - they are interchangeable - the client gets to pick the best idea and the best designer - whatever they like. In fact, the client gets to keep all the ideas no matter which architect they choose. It's a great system - if you are the client.

Mark said, he lived his life like this. He said every day offers you endless options - pick the best one. He had no grand plan, no theory of change, no destination in mind, he had a habit of picking the best option from whatever was in front of him. For him, this was exciting, for me, nerve-wracking. But, then again, that's one of the things that makes us different. This is the ethic at the heart of one of my favorite films - Frozen II - where the principal characters encourage each other - do the next right thing. Do the next right thing and a pathway will emerge. This is a pilgrimage ethic, not a travel ethic and it is beautifully summed up in a poem by the Spanish poet Antonio Machado who writes this:

“Traveler, your footprints
are the only road, nothing else.
Traveler, there is no road;
you make your own path as you walk.
As you walk, you make your own road,
and when you look back
you see the path
you will never travel again.
Traveler, there is no road;
only a ship's wake on the sea.”

Jesuit author and spiritual companion to Ignatius of Loyola said it this way: “The road is our home.” The journey is our life. Our destination is God.

Friends, it turns out, we have not yet arrived - arriving was never the point. We are on a journey. We don't know how far the journey will take us. We need to get comfortable with walking. The road is our home. We make the path by walking. Jesus is our companion, our destination is God. This has always been true. But it is a lesson we are all relearning each and every day.

I hate it.

Thank God for it.

Thank God we have each other as our companions on the way. Thank God that Jesus travels with us and we make the path by walking, together. Together with God, we will find our way. *Amen*