

Let's Go for a Walk

Sermon notes for the sermon
Given by Steve Zahorbenski
On Sunday, June 26, 2011

Sermon:

Walk – advance or travel on foot at a moderate pace; move about by advancing the feet alternately so that there is always one foot on the ground. Also: to conduct oneself in a particular manner; pursue a particular course of life; to cause to walk, lead, guide or instruct carefully one step at a time.

How did you get here this morning? The question is not so much “how did I come to be at this particular place at this particular time, but physically how did you get here? For many of us, we walked. Some of you might say “I drove here”. That is probably true. But where is your car now? How did you get from your car to your seat in the pew?

Walking plays a very important role in our lives. We walk across the stage at our high school or college graduation to (hopefully) receive our diploma. We walk down the aisle at our wedding as a single person then up the aisle as a couple. We walk down the aisle in church during communion or baptism. Your mother would get up from whatever she was doing to walk over to your crib or bed. She would pick you up and carry you and comfort you, or feed you until you were comfortable or resting again. My own mother did not drive (or ever learn). She would walk to school to meet my sister and me and then the three of us would walk downtown to the dentist or to the library or do shopping, especially at Christmas. We would tell of school-day adventures and Mom was always right there with us to guide us or help us across the street.

One of the first encounters Man and Woman have with God is shortly after they have eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They heard God walking in the garden. Man and Woman and all creatures were created in the image of God. God enabled many living things to walk, to be like Him. Adam and

Eve walked away from the garden and the protection and love of God. We do not scientifically know how the rest of the world was populated; suffice it to say that it was part of God's plan. After people had established themselves in one place, often they had to move to another place. We know the reasons: famine, war, natural disasters.

Abram and Sarai were told to leave their country and go to the land that God would show them. They took all they owned and journeyed together to the new land. They eventually made their way to Egypt after a famine in their new land. After a time, they came back to Canaan and were told "to walk the length and breadth of the land, for I will give it to you." By whom? God. God also told Abram to "walk before me and be blameless, and I will make my covenant between me and you."

Moses led the Hebrew people out of Egypt. They walked through the Red Sea to Canaan. Several hundred thousand people followed in Moses' footsteps. God had made a covenant with Moses that He would give the Hebrews the land. They left Egypt in a hurry, so much so that their bread was not given time to rise. They wandered in the desert for 40 years. Wondering. Wandering. Walking about from one place to another. How did they survive? God provided manna for their food for the journey. God showed them where to go and led them.

The Old Testament is full of stories of people moving from one place to another. It is presumed that most of these journeys were on foot. Only the rich and powerful (or the weakest, oldest, sickest) could be carried and helped along the way. Walking became a symbol of power. If you could not walk, you were dependent on someone to carry or transport you, to take care of you, powerless. If you were wealthy or a ruler, you could order or pay someone to carry you from place to place, or you could send someone to get something for you (doing the walking for you). As you got more power, other forms of walking came into practice. Running is just longer steps at a faster pace. Marching is walking with much more deliberate steps. We are always on the move. If we are walking, or running, or marching, we are moving toward a goal, a prize. When we start

walking as a young child, we have parents or older siblings to guide us.

Sometimes we need a helper (a cane, walking stick, crutches) to help steady our steps.

Walks are used to comfort us. Many people go to a park or along the ocean or a lake to walk and experience God's creation. They get a sense of peace. One summer my family rented a cabin on a lake near the Delaware Water Gap. One day my grandfather, father and I went for a walk in the woods. I have a photograph of Grandpa and me on that walk. Grandpa is leading, and I am following, copying his every step, even holding a walking stick the same way. The photo shows us in a patch of light, emerging from the dark shade. By his love and guidance, my grandfather showed me where to go on that hike. He was one of my guides along my journey of faith. Many of us can probably remember a person in our life who led us on the path.

Abraham, Jacob, Moses and many others were chosen by God to lead their people to a new land and new opportunities. God did not say you MAY go if you want, or "have your people call my people and we'll work something out. God said "Go!" What was the leader's response? "Here I am, Lord, send me." Or, "Yes, Lord, I will go." These leaders believed in and trusted God to show the way. God said, "Go. I will be with you." He was with them when he gave them manna to eat while they were on the journey. He went before them as a pillar of fire and smoke, both as a guide and protective shield. The leaders could see the power and protection of God in everything they did. When things were going well, they praised God. When things went badly, they blamed and cursed God.

Jesus spent his whole life and ministry walking. Joseph and Mary walked to Bethlehem for the tax registration. They walked to an inn and a stable (a place where animals that walked were cared for) and Jesus was born there. As the child grew, he walked to the temple, to the scroll and read aloud the words of the prophets and psalmists, and learned from the teachers. He walked to the Jordan River to be baptized. The Holy Spirit came and filled Jesus. He walked along the sea, and called Peter, Andrew, James and John, to be his disciples. Later, he

walked from Pilate's house to his own crucifixion. After his resurrection, he walked along the road with the two men and revealed himself to them. The Apostles and other disciples went out into the world spreading the gospel, and healing the sick and the lame.

Ancient people believed that people were blind or lame because they or their parents sinned. What is a sin? Disobeying God. Jesus not only forgave the sins, he also restored them to health and wholeness. He told the lame, "take up your pallet and walk". The lame man's response? He got up and walked. Because of his faith in God, he was able to be healed and to walk. He was put in a right relationship with God. He trusted God to take care of him. Jesus called his disciples to follow him; they stopped whatever they were doing, left their homes and families, and followed Jesus. They accompanied him on his journey to tell the world of God's love. Jesus told his disciples to take nothing with them; God would provide for their needs.

How do we respond to God's call? If we are to follow in Jesus' footsteps, Micah says it best: "what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." We are to believe – believe that God loves us and He will take care of us. We are to serve God by serving others. We find a friend or a guide to accompany us. Many of you know that Sue and I met on a walk in Hacklebarney Park over thirty five years ago, and we are walking together on the path. Have you found someone to walk with?

We walk the path that God has chosen for us. How do we know we are on the right path? We need to obey God's commands and trust him to be our guide, our light. Where are we going on this journey?

We find many examples of walking – following – leading in today's culture. There are many books, films, songs and poems that have this theme. I encourage you to take note of these. Some that are helpful to me (especially this week as I prepared this talk) are:

- "I'll Walk With God" from the operetta The Student Prince

- “You’ll Never Walk Alone” from the musical “Carousel” by Rodgers & Hammerstein, probably more commonly known as the theme song for Jerry Lewis’ Muscular Dystrophy telethon. Muscular Dystrophy is a disease that robs people of the ability to walk.
- The famous poem “Footprints in the Sand”, actually written in the 1930s.

Several of the Upper Room Daily Reflections that came into my email this week talked about walking. One of them included these lines: We respond to the call of God by stepping out, one graced step at a time, into a luminous darkness. Our direction is clear, but the route reveals itself only as we put one foot in front of the other. We cannot know beforehand exactly where we are heading or how we will there. Nevertheless, we trust God to show us – and to be for us – the Way.

Amen.

Benediction/Blessing:

Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart and you’ll never walk alone. Go in peace.