

# **The Journey Is Home**

**Sermon notes for the sermon  
Given by Rev. Lisanne Finston  
Presented on Sunday, March 27, 2011**

My family spent a year living in The Hague, Holland when I was in sixth grade. It was an exciting time for me...new culture, new neighborhood, new school...many new adventures. One of the most memorable times for me was the day I set off to school for play rehearsal on my own. The American School of The Hague, where I attended school, was on the other side of the city and this was the first time I was allowed to take the city bus, all by myself. My mother asked at least ten times if I was sure that I knew where the bus stop was, where the drop off point was etc. "MOOOOMMM" ...was my response, "of course I know" (11 year olds do know everything after all, I have one and I know...) Well, I walked to the bus stop, got on the bus and rode the 30 minutes to school. As the bus pulled up to its destination and the remaining passengers exited, the bus driver looked at me quizzically. I asked him when we would be arriving at the school. "This bus does not go in that direction" he replied, "You have taken the bus in the wrong direction". He helped me to phone my mother and explain the situation. My mother drove 30 minutes to pick me up, and the additional hour back in the other direction to school. She didn't make any of the expected "I told you so" remarks; she just drove me to school, and chatted along the way, as if it was perfectly natural to take the bus in the wrong direction.

Well, I have had many adventures since that time, many a memorable excursion. It seems like I am always "on the way" somewhere. One day a couple of weeks ago I was leaving the soup kitchen on the way to a meeting when one of the Soup Kitchen regulars waved me down, "I need to speak to you" he said. "I'll catch you at lunch, I'm on the way to a meeting now" I replied. At lunch he waved me down again, "Got a minute?" he asked. "Only a minute" I replied, "I'm on the way to another meeting". "You sure spend a lot of time on the way"

he said. I sure do spend a lot of time "on the way"...

Life is a series of "on the ways", excursions, journeys...journey means "travel or passage from one place to another." Sometimes we head in the right direction, sometimes we head in the wrong direction, sometimes our destination is clear, other times it is unexpected, or not very clear at all; sometimes there is a nice bus driver to help us, sometimes there isn't anyone at all. Indeed, all of life is a journey. Life is a series of passages and movements, along which we not only go, but we grow. Much like the passages we make as we travel from one place to another physically...from home to school, to work, to church, so too, we make spiritual and developmental passages as well, from childhood to adolescence, to adulthood, through lessons and losses. All of life is a journey, a journey to which we have been called by God.

This is the season of Lent. It is a time for growing through repentance, prayer, fasting, almsgiving and concentration upon our baptismal covenant. Lent is not only a season, but a journey. The Lenten journey is a lifelong process of being transformed into the life and holiness of our Sovereign and God. Lent is thus not giving up something but rather taking upon ourselves the intention and the receptivity to God's grace so that we may worthily participate in the mystery of God-with-us. As we focus on Lent, let us consider what we need to make the journey...

1) "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." "I will make of you a great nation"...and so we begin the journey with a vision. We are not just called to set out and wander aimlessly. God calls us and leads us towards a common purpose, a desired or intended future state. God's promise is more than a pledge, it is a vision of how God would like the world to be and our place within it. So we begin any journey with a vision for God's desired future, and a sense of our role and God's call upon us to make it happen.

2) Second we must follow God's call to journey...seems obvious, and seems simple, but it's not. Luke's description of Jesus' journey towards Jerusalem finds him meeting many along the way who would be followers. But when push comes to shove, those who would follow always have an excuse that keeps them from fulfilling their call..."I have to bury my father", "I have to say goodbye to my family"...noble as the reasons and intentions may be, we all have commitments, relationships and obligations that distract us from God and the call to follow. The bottom line is...there is a cost to discipleship. The life of faith is a journey of choices about how we will live our lives.

3) Third, we must take some risks along the journey...Abraham and Sarah were well acquainted with journeying. They set out, at God's request, to seek the promised land. Imagine leaving everything and everyone familiar, setting out for a land you have never seen before. Much like our immigrant neighbors, friends and even ancestors who came to this country, people took an enormous risk. They faced fear of the unknown, risked losing the comfort of the familiar, took a chance at losing in order to gain. They risked everything to follow the call of God. And, on their journey, they discovered that God is like a bus driver who helps point us in the right direction when we take a wrong turn, or like a mother who will go out of her way to pick you up and journey with you to the appointed destination.

4) ...I'm pretty sure that Abraham and Sarah and company did not have the benefit of GPS or OnStar or mapquest or an I phone App to help them find the Promised Land. They had to be paying attention, open to the guidance of God. In just these few verses of Genesis, God appears twice to Abraham, and twice Abraham builds an altar to God. There is a give

and take between God and followers described here, a relationship, and through the relationship, we learn that also along the journey we must be open to the presence of God to guide us.

Rabbi Rami Shapiro of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality translates these verses in Genesis to read: "God said to Abraham, 'leave your country, your family, your father's house and walk inward to the land I will show you'". He goes on to say "This is what true spirituality demands: to leave everything we know; to relinquish everything we are; to wander without a goal, path, teacher or teaching, simply trusting that when we get 'there', we will know."

Nelle Morton writes, "Maybe journey is not so much a journey ahead, or a journey into space, but journey into presence. The farthest place on earth is the journey into the presence of the nearest person to you or the journey into the presence of God". To be in the presence of God requires our presence.

This congregation has been on a journey together. As individuals, you have each made many passages, each have your own story to remember, tell and share. But as a congregation, you also have been journeying.

The United Methodist Church has served as a beacon of light, justice and love in this city for 200 years. 50 years ago, there were three UM churches in town. All facing the same complex of societal issues and pressures, smaller congregations carrying the burden of maintaining aging buildings, they came together to envision their future in the city. A committee was formed of six representatives from each congregation appointed by the official Boards of the three Churches. This Committee began meeting regularly in the fall of 1960 and after a number of meetings and considerable discussion agreed that a union of the three Methodist Congregations should occur. Here is what they envisioned for the merger, excerpted from a document found on your web site:

- (1) A strong new church centrally located in New Brunswick.
- (2) A full church at worship and full classes at all age levels in the Church School.

(3) A strong youth program for both Junior and Senior high school students.

(4) An adequate ministerial, educational and clerical staff.

(5) Greater opportunity for effective Community Service including a more effective liaison with Methodist Students in the University.

Today, you are invited to participate in a visioning process for this congregation. We will gather in the social hall and share ideas, concerns, passions and solutions that will prepare us for our future together over the next 10-20 years. People of faith are a people of vision, and hope and love...we are building on the hopes and dreams of those who have gone before, creating the opportunities for worship, faith development, service and acts of compassion and justice that fuel God's kingdom tomorrow...we are on a journey.

The journey of faith is one of inward and ongoing reflection shaped by the actions and events of our lives. The journey of faith is characterized in part by these attributes...first that we have a vision and an understanding of God's purpose and call upon our lives, that we respond to the call to follow on the journey and accept that there is a cost to discipleship; we accept that this takes risk and we dare to face the challenges of the life of faith; and finally, to be in the presence of God, requires our presence.

The journey you see, is itself our home...it is a way of life...home is not a place, as Nelle Morton describes, home is a movement, a quality of relationship, a state where people seek to be their own, to be God's own, to live as God wants us to live, increasingly responsible for the world and one another. This is our calling, our journey, to love God and each other,. no matter where the road may lead us, the destination is not really all that important, but rather, how we live our lives along the way...