Joy in the Journey

There is a joy in the journey.
There is hope for those on the way.
There is a wonder and wildness in life,
And freedom for those who obey.¹

"The journey is home."
Nelle Morton

Nancy Pierson, a colleague in ministry at St. Mark United Methodist church, once spoke about one of her talks with Matt, her five year old son. She was tucking him in bed one night when he said, "I like my bed."

Nancy, thinking Matt was stalling for time, agreed that it was a nice bed and told him to go to sleep. He then added, "We're awful lucky aren't we mom?" Still trying to end the conversation, she said, "Yes we are lucky. We have a nice family and a nice home. And you need to go to sleep now."

Matt then looked up at her and said, "But this really isn't our home, Mom." Well this caught Nancy's interest, and so she asked him why he had said this? What did he know that she didn't?

Matt answered both simply and truthfully. "We won't really be home, mom, till we're with God," was his reply.

The search for home can become an obsession. We all want to go home, and in our hustle and bustle we forget what are hearts know - Our only real home is with God. The Psalmist knew this and wrote, "You, O God, have always been our home." The apostle Paul knew this and once said our desire to be home with God is so great we groan, we sigh with anxiety to be in our heavenly home.

The wayfaring stranger realized that the only true home he would ever have could be found only with God. And we know "this world is not our home," and as the song says, "we are only passing through."

There is no need, however, to kid ourselves into thinking that this journey will be easy. All soujourners know the road can get quite difficult. What else could one expect following after a wanderer whose journey ultimately led him to a cross. This fellow sojourner also calls us to pick up our own crosses, never mind the fear of the unknown that lies ahead on the road.

One of the most important messages of the gospel is that we have nothing to

fear if we are in Christ. This is nowhere more aptly seen than in Mark 4: 35-41. Here the disciples are making a little journey of their own across the sea of Galilee. Jesus had just finished teaching one of the many multitudes he would face throughout his ministry, and he had taken advantage of the quiet by taking a quick nap in the stern of the boat.

A storm came up, however, while Jesus slept. And it became so severe the disciples feared for their lives and cried out, "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" For an answer Jesus calmed the storm and asked a question of his own - "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?"

The message is straightforward. Those who have faith in God have nothing to fear. Now it is one thing to have faith in the everyday. It is easy to have faith in the sturdiness of a well-built boat. It is easy to believe that the dock and the snug, calm harbor are safe places. But it is another thing altogether to believe in God - to believe that God is there with us.

On a personal note, I can remember times as a child I would wake up, scared to death, chill bumps running up and down my arms, hair tingling with the fear and knowledge that the monster in my dreams had just gobbled up my brother (which wasn't a bad idea to me at times) and was about to have me for desert (a not so good idea).

I would cry out in the night and mom or dad would run into the room and reassure me that all was well. My brother was still alive and breathing and no monster would touch me tonight. In a few sleepy, silent moments my mother or father would love away the noise, the shadow, the fear.

The gospel awakens its hearers to the knowledge that God has done this for them as well. God has met them in the awful night. God has journeyed with them, and has wrapped them up in love. God assures them that we can trust the love of the eternal more than any darkness. Those with ears to hear the good news are assured that there is no place one can go where God cannot be found. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Is there anything to fear? God walks with us, and ultimately the pilgrim can be at home walking with God, a God who is our friend.

Sally McFague, in *Models of God*, interprets what it means to be friends with God.

The model of God as friend says that we are not our own, but also that we are not on our own; as friends of the Friend of the world, we do not belong to ourselves nor are we left to ourselves. It is in this context of God as present with us as we work together to feed, heal and liberate the world that prayer becomes both natural and necessary. We ask God, as one would a friend, to be present in the joy of our shared meals and in the sufferings of strangers; to give us courage and stamina for the work we do together; to forgive us for lack of fidelity to the common vision and lack of trust in divine trustfulness. Finally we ask God
the friend to support, forgive, and comfort us as we struggle together to save our beleaguered planet, our beautiful earth, or blue and green marble in a universe of silent rock and fire. Just as betrayal is the sin of friendship in which one hands over the friend to the enemy, so intercessory prayer is the rite of friendship in which one hands over the friend to God. When we pray for our friend the earth, for whose future we fear, we hand it over not to the enemy but to the Friend who is freely, joyfully, and permanently bonded to this, our beloved world. The model of God as friend defies despair.²

And so it is that roads and journeys and home have come to occupy my mind of late. The road is long, the journey rough, and we often come to wonder if we will ever find a home that will be home for good. In many ways we are like the poor wayfaring stranger, but there is a difference. A friend walks with, comforting us, urging us toward home. "We can dare throw ourselves into the journey, the pilgrimage, even the adventure, because the basic message of Christianity is that God has fallen in love with us. So much in love, that God has even sent the Christ into the world to bring us home."³ One writer has put it very well:

It was once claimed that all roads lead to Rome.
But that was in Rome's day in the sun, long gone
Then some lost vagabond,
caught looking back on a lonely life, wailed,
"All roads lead home."
Not so the poet countered, "You can't go home again."

True, but where then can one go?
Must there be some destination one can name?

Confused, lonely, bewildered, beaten wanderers in the wasteland world someday in their sorrows hear a Pilgrim's voice they only half believe, calling out to them across the distance and the years.

I am the way, he says, Come this way home.

I find assurance and even joy in knowing that Christ welcomes as fellow-travelers the whole train of half-believers, outcasts, prodigals and sinners, as ordinary and average as I am. In this company with Jesus and other pilgrims I can discover that even the road itself is home. As Nelle Morton once attested, "the journey becomes home."

³ Jones, p. 79.
To close this section and the paper, I return to Rupp’s exegesis of the poem "Homesick Cranes." She writes:

The homesick crane in us is the pilgrim who never arrives, who is always going home, sometimes not having any idea of which way to turn but knowing deep within that there is a goal awaiting and that it is well worth the journey with all its ups and downs, with all its hellos and goodbyes.\(^4\)

To this I say, "Amen."

We must go home.
No simple trip,
ticking off landmarks,
rewinding the cord
of our travels.
The string's been cut
that measured out our miles.
We're shaken loose by Truth
which throws us back
toward the neglected,
too familiar place
where incarnation's to be lived.
Emboldened by encounter
we set forth
toward the unknown,
toward home.\(^5\)

God of our journeys,
we thank you for the trails that bring us home again,
for life coming full circle,
for births and deaths,
for memories of times and places
that you have made holy in our minds.
Lead us back to those who have touched us,
and loved us,
and set our feet upon the pathways of faith.
Let us touch them in return. Amen.\(^6\)

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\(^4\) Rupp, p. 63.


\(^6\) Bob Cagle, Alive Now, September/October 1986, p. 60.