

BOOK OF FAITH -- WELCOME TO THE JOURNEY...

HELLO AND WELCOME to our BOOK OF FAITH Journey, from Pastors Charlie and Jay. Each week we'll be sharing by email, on Monday, some ways to continue exploring our weekly sermons and messages. Use these throughout the week in any way you find helpful as we journey together during the coming year. Blessings on your journey!

ALSO NOTE: On the website -- www.firstlutheran.com -- you will find audio versions of our Sunday sermons and messages, some print versions of sermons and messages, and a weekly "Take It Home" devotional for our families with children. You are invited to take advantage of the website resources to nurture your and your family's faith throughout the week.

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HOW DO WE GET THERE?

We all need maps or guides -- electronic or paper -- to help us find our way. We can't get to our destination unless someone helps us. Behind every map, trail guide or GPS system is a whole host of people and their work. It's a COMMUNITY that is helping us. The same is true with our Christian life of discipleship. We need a map, a trail guide and/or GPS -- that is, a community -- to help and guide us.

** What do you think about the Bible being a representation of the Community that God provides to help guide us on our Faith Journey? Do you see the Bible as a variety of "trail guides", shared by people like you and me, in former times, who have traveled the same journey we are exploring today? Our journey won't be exactly the same, but the Bible - and it's people - do give us hints, clues and suggestions along the way. They also point out obstacles, nourishment, dangers and resting places along the "trail."

In John 14:1-7, John tells a story about the disciples asking "Jesus, how do we know the way to go?" (Keep in mind, John's gospel was written long after the earthly Jesus had left the scene. It is certainly understandable that John's community, around 90 CE (AD) or so, was really struggling with that question.) Jesus' reply conveys that "If you see me, and the way I've lived, and what my life and teachings were about, then you know the way to go." Jesus wasn't comparing himself, or Christianity, to other religions and claiming superiority. (Some Christians assume this based on our current cultural context). Rather, Jesus is saying, "In me, in my life, in my actions and my teachings... you see God, and you see the best, God-intended way for you to live as a faithful Jew."

WHERE ARE WE HEADED?

As we set out on our journey, we also need to be clear about our destination. Otherwise, how will we know when we arrive? The destination of our Christian life is NOT heaven. The destination is two-fold: (1) A relationship with God through Jesus where we know and experience God's amazing grace (love, forgiveness, wholeness, shalom); AND (2) A relationship with people and God's creation based on our being vessels of God's amazing grace. That's our destination in a nutshell, and that's what this journey is all about. It's the two-fold relationship that encompasses our earthly existence, and continues into whatever comes next, after this earth-bound, body-bound life ends. It's the adventure of a life-time because it is a life-time of adventure. Read what one trail guide, Paul, says in Philippians 3:10-12.

AM I ON MY OWN?

Now here's the neat thing. We never travel alone on this journey. God is our constant companion. God promises to be with us whether we make the right turns or wrong ones, whether we take detours or travel the main roads, whether the weather is nice or stormy. God is with us. Christians say that God entered into our world in the human life of Jesus in a special way. But that wasn't enough. Now God travels with us through the Body of Christ, the Church... EACH OTHER! God is not only the destination toward which we move but also the companion who travels with us -- through the Holy Spirit, through our brothers and sister companions -- to help us keep moving on this journey.

SO WHAT, REALLY, AM I SEARCHING FOR?

Before maps and Global Positioning Systems, people navigated by the position of the stars. They'd look for the North Star and go from there. In the movie, [Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest](#), Captain Jack Sparrow has a special compass. It doesn't point to true north. Rather, it points to the treasure he seeks.

+ What is the treasure I seek?

+ What or who is my "guiding star" or "compass"?

+ Do these fit with the kind of life Jesus showed me, and the kind of life God dreams of for me?

INTERSECTION: MY STORY, THE BIBLE'S STORY AND GOD'S STORY...

It's not always easy to find our way or discern God's presence and love when life seems stacked against us. This is where the Bible and our own faith stories become so critical to the journey. The Bible contains stories of people who have traveled before us, stories of people who have experienced hardship, illness, loss, deliverance, restoration, forgiveness, and love; stories of people who wondered where God was when bad things happened to them, amazed at how God sustained them, felt alone and wondered whether God was real, and learned to trust God's promises; stories of fervent religious and social authorities claiming exclusive rights to the truth about God and the world, only to be very wrong and very contrary to the way God wants for the world. Gee, it sounds a lot like our lives, perhaps...

+ What Bible stories connect with my life stories? How have they given me encouragement, hope, or strength?

+ As you listen to someone this week, see if you can relate what they tell you to a Bible story or to your own life story. Commit to be a companion to that person, share the burden, and walk with that person for a time. Is there a story you can share with them about how God has helped you in a similar situation?

WHAT IS THE BIBLE, ANYWAY?

+ What do you believe about the Bible? Where did those ideas come from?

+ What do others believe about the Bible, who differ from your opinion or perspective? What do you do with that diversity?

** NOTE: If you are interested in exploring the Bible, its history, its relevance, its origins, questions you have about the Bible, and especially its usefulness for our life and world today, consider joining the Sunday morning adult group called "Faith Foundations" which meets in Room 6 at 10:00 AM on Sunday mornings. They are just beginning a new series using the book, "Reading the Bible Again for the First Time."

NEXT SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20: WEEK ONE OF "THE TOP TEN STORIES & THEMES OF THE HEBREW BIBLE (OLD TESTAMENT)"

** NOTE: If you are interested in attending a Sunday morning class that will loosely follow the sermon series for the next ten weeks, consider joining the Cornerstone Class, which meets at 10 AM on Sundays in Room 8. They will be viewing an overview video series on the Old Testament by Professor Amy-Jill Levine from Vanderbilt University, who received her PhD from Duke. They get started with the series this coming Sunday.