

Year C, March 17, 2019
2 Lent
Christ Church, Mexia

"Where is my Sunday paper?!!" - the irate, elderly customer calling the newspaper office loudly demanded to know where her Sunday edition was. "Madam," said the newspaper employee, "today is Saturday. The Sunday paper is not delivered until tomorrow, on *Sunday*." There was a long pause on the other end of the phone, and then the customer was heard to mutter, "Well, drat! that's why no one was at church today."

It's easy to lose track of the time, not only as we age, but because our lives are constantly in motion, and we are a highly mobile society. Most of us were not born in Mexia, and some of those who were have been tempted to leave for greener pastures from time-to-time.

In the OT lesson, we are reminded how God caused Abram, as he was called at that time, to move - to leave his ancestral home. And in the NT reading we are reminded how Jesus was called to journey from his home in Nazareth to Jerusalem to fulfill God's purpose. However, that was not the norm at that time, and home for many people in many cultures, even today, is relatively stable and geographically restricted. Many people throughout the world, live and die within miles of where they are born, without having ever traveled very far away from home.

Of course, my observation is based upon a particular definition of home - being the place where one is born, where one's parents reside, or other factors associated with this world. But Lent is the time when we must consider, among other things, where is our home? And in his letter to the Philippians, Paul makes it very clear "...our citizenship is in heaven..." It is not earth. It is from this heavenly country, our true home, that Christ will come to transform us that we "...may be conformed to the body of HIS glory - HIS glory."

And here, let me fulfill what Chad Walsh says is "the true function of a preacher" and that is "**to disturb the comfortable** and to comfort the disturbed" by pointing out that "the secret of every discord in Christian homes and communities and churches is that we seek our OWN way and our OWN glory (Alan Redpath)" - not HIS way, HIS glory. God calls us all on a journey - to return home - to return to God - and to help others find their way as well.

And I can't think about a journey without being reminded of Robert Frost's poem, "the Road Not Taken." "It describes two roads discovered during a walk in the woods. Frost knows he can only explore one, and he tells himself that someday he will travel the other. But, realistically, he knows he will never return. And by the time we reach the end of the poem, we realize the poet is talking about something infinitely more important than a simple choice of paths.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

No, Frost is not talking about the choice of paths in a wood, but the choice of paths in a person's life. Choosing a road symbolizes any choice we must make between alternatives that may appear equally attractive but lead to entirely different destinations." (Charles Swindoll)

As Christians, we too are called to be on our way, just as Abraham and Jesus before us. We are called to venture away from the comfortable and the familiar things of this world and to become a disciple of Christ.

Unfortunately, William Barclay, reminds us, "it is possible to be a follower of Jesus without being a disciple; to be a camp follower without being a soldier of the king; to be a hanger-on in some great work without pulling one's weight. Once someone was talking to a great scholar about a younger man. He said, 'So and so tells me that he was one of your students.' The teacher answered devastatingly, 'He may have attended my lectures, but he was NOT one of my students.' There is a world of difference between attending lectures and being a student. It is one of the supreme handicaps of the Church that in the Church there are so many distant followers of Jesus and so few real disciples (*Gospel of Luke*)."

During this period of Lent we need to decide whether or not we will truly undertake this journey, and if so, which road we will take – which we will be – distant follower or disciple? As we ponder this very important decision, let us recall the words of a Franciscan blessing:

May God bless us with discomfort at easy answers, half truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may live deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, and war, so that we may reach out our hand to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done.

African Methodist Episcopal Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie, the first woman bishop of that denomination, said at the Way of Love conference of our bishops recently: The church needs to be "reminded that the church at her best is the whatever-it-takes church. It is a church that is open to the new leadings of the Holy Spirit. It's open to the possibilities of the future. It doesn't settle for good-enough. It keeps asking itself, 'Is better possible?' Sometimes, it is a church where biblical priorities are chosen over methods and traditions." – the way we have always done it.

The questions for Lent are: Will you claim your citizenship in heaven, and will you truly share in the sacrifice of Christ? Will we as a church begin to think differently? For example, will we go to where the people are who need to know about the gospel, or will we continue to wait for them to find us? Such a journey is not easy, but the way of the cross leads us home – to our true home.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.

Amen.