

“Grateful for the Journey”
Jeremiah 6:16; Luke 24:13-16, 28-35
A Sermon by Rev. Bob Kells

PRAYER: Holy God, we give you thanks once again for your presence with us wherever we are and wherever we go. We know you as the God of our homes and our hearts, the God of the road and our travels, the God who is with us in the midst of our turmoils, the God who leads us to peace. Gracious God, help us to hear your word of grace. May we be blessed in the hearing and blessed as we strive to do and to be people who show your love in the world today. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing to you. In the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

We are in graduation season, a season for change and transition. We’re thinking mostly of our high school and college graduates who are celebrating, and being celebrated, for their achievements in completing their studies. They are moving on, some to college, some to work, and some are not sure yet where they are going—and that’s okay...all in God’s good time.

At the graduation ceremonies, people are giving speeches and sharing their thoughts on the keys to successful living, or advice about the future. You might have heard some quotes from these kinds of speeches before. Some are quite good. Here’s a sampling of some I found online:

“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.” *Eleanor Roosevelt*

“Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don’t matter and those who matter don’t mind.” *Theodor Geisel, aka, Dr. Seuss*

“It’s hard to beat a person who never gives up.” *Babe Ruth*

“That clock you hear is the sound of your own heart. Sink your teeth in to this life, and don’t let go.”

Lin-Manuel Miranda

“No matter what happens in life, be good to people. Being good to people is a wonderful legacy to leave behind.” *Taylor Swift*

And finally, a favorite of mine from one of the world’s great philosophers, former New York Yankee Yogi Berra: “When you come to a fork in the road, take it!”

These are good quotes, and good advice for graduates or anyone in a season of transition, for people who are moving on.

We are in such a season today. We’ve been traveling together in this community of faith; we are on a spiritual journey with Jesus; and now comes the time when we must part company. As I prepared this message with some final thoughts for you on this Lord’s Day I have to admit, I was tempted to pass on some “words of wisdom” of my own, like those quotes I read a moment ago. But the more I thought and prayed about it, the more I realized that more advice is not what we need right now. “Words to the wise” can often come across as other peoples’ answers to questions that may have little to do with us. Maybe what we need to listen for on this journey is not answers but questions.

Questions are what we find in today’s scripture readings, both of which concern being on a journey. The first question comes from a passage I’ve grown to love in the book of the prophet Jeremiah:

Thus says the Lord: Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls” (Jeremiah 6:16)

Now, the prophet Jeremiah was no shrinking violet. When it came to proclaiming the word of God, Jeremiah did not hold back. He couldn’t. You see, God had sent Jeremiah to the people of Judah during a difficult transitional period for the Jewish people. They had gone astray—again—and judgment was coming in the form of the Babylonian army, which would capture Jerusalem and carry away many people into exile.

Now there were in that day, just as in ours, “Court Prophets,” the religious men who had the ear of the kings. They told the kings just what they wanted to hear. Their message was: “Don’t worry, don’t to listen to this Jeremiah—he does not speak for God. Keep on with you plans, O king. Keep offering sacrifices in the Temple and all will be well.”

The Jewish people were at a crossroads, once again. Once again, they were looking for a way to go, or a way out of the impending judgment. There was an opportunity, a chance to repent and it came in the form of a

question: “ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies.” The ancient paths were the covenant with God as summed up in the Law of Moses. God was calling them back to the true worship of God, worship that focused on the priorities God set for Israel: love God first and foremost, take care of the poor, feed the hungry, watch over the widow and the orphan, welcome the alien in the land, stop building up your own wealth by exploiting people...and let me say again, love the Lord.

“Ask for the ancient paths.”

There it is: the question. But who do we ask? Who is at the crossroads for us to inquire?

We look to all kinds of people for direction in life: parents, teachers, first responders, advice columns in the paper, “expert” consultants, our seniors...sometimes we’ll even ask a pastor! In the verse from Jeremiah, I don’t know where these crossroads were or who would be around them to ask, in the country or a town or a mountain trail.

- I like to think they were some place where you could find a shepherd, a person who knew the territory, who knew those ancient paths well.
- I like to think it was a shepherd because it makes me think of Jesus and how he leads us through all the seasons of our lives.

I believe that if we look, we will find Jesus at the crossroads of our lives. Ask Jesus for the ancient paths, the way to God, the way to rest for your soul. “Come to me all you who labor and carry heavy burdens,” Jesus said, “and I will give you rest.”

Luke’s description of the disciples on the Emmaus Road is a beautiful story of what happens to us as we journey together. And it is filled with questions:

- Two disciples set out from Jerusalem toward Emmaus on the first day of the week. They were talking about reports that the tomb where Jesus’ body had lain was empty.
- A man, who Luke tells us is Jesus but remains unrecognized by the disciples, meets them on the way: “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” he asked.
- They stopped and say to the man: “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there..?”
- “What things?” the man asked.
- The disciples tell him all about what happened to Jesus.
- Then the stranger berates them for being slow to understand what they have been told by the prophets and then says: “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”

Questions, questions, questions all along the way. These disciples were perplexed about Jesus. But notice how Jesus did not clear up their confusion until the three were together, sharing a meal, where Jesus gave thanks and broke bread; only then were their eyes opened, and he vanished from their sight.

In their journey to Emmaus, these two disciples did not get answers to their questions...no words of wisdom...no memorable quotes or good suggestions to live by. No, instead of answers, they got a person—Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior—who was revealed to them during their journey. I think this is how we live much of our lives—in the questions we encounter along the way. Like the disciples walking to Emmaus, it’s in the questions that we meet Jesus, who opens our eyes to the world of possibilities God has prepared for us. As you journey through life, enjoy the words of wisdom, but live in the questions; and, once again, like the disciples, you will find that Jesus has been with us all along.

I want to close by saying that I am nothing but grateful for the times we have shared together in ministry.

- I thank God each day for the call to ministry, and for the opportunity I had to be your pastor for this phase of your journey.
- I am so pleased with what we have done together, with the help of God, these last eight years.
- And I know God is pleased because we have kept the faith, we have shared God’s love, and we continue to follow Jesus into the future God has prepared for us.

Thank you, Weller’s Church, for all you have done to make me a better pastor and a better human being. And thank you, Jesus Christ, for never giving up on me...for never giving up on us. Perfect us in your love, O precious Savior. Amen and amen.