

SERMON
“Trekking”
John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15
Sunday, May 20, 2018

It has always been on my bucket list to spend several nights in a cabin on a lake in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Lake Superior is the only Great Lake I have not seen. And for the past several months I have been busy making this dream become a reality. So, come this July Lori and I will be spending four nights in a cabin on a small lake in Hancock, Michigan. But this was no easy task to accomplish. The first cabin owner never even responded to my email inquiries. The second owner was away from their computer when I inquired of renting their cabin and never saw my email until they had already booked their cabin for the week I requested to someone else. I was starting to get the feeling that while the Upper Peninsula of Michigan was my vacation destination it was not necessarily what God had in mind for me.

That’s when I started looking at cruises to Alaska. That too is on my bucket list.

But then my father died. And I knew part of my vacation would now involve a trip to New York State for a Memorial Service and a burial in July. Alaska was out of the running. And Michigan was looking bleak. It was then that I got an email message from the owner of the second cabin I had inquired of informing me that there were four nights available in the middle of July if I was still interested in coming to Michigan.

And that’s when I started getting serious about my summer vacation. In fact, I became so excited about going to the U.P. of Michigan that I quickly booked two lake cruises on Lake Superior. I called friends in the Detroit area and asked if we could spend sometime with them on the way to the U.P. When I realized that our journey would take us to the Apostle Islands on the far west end of Lake Superior in Wisconsin I said to myself; “I have never been to Minneapolis and the Mall of America, and now that I am so close we’ll go there as well.”

And then well looking at places to stay in Minneapolis I noticed that Walnut Grove was only a three-hour drive further west. I spent my childhood reading Laura Ingalls Wilder’s Little House on the Prairie books as well as watching the television show. Before I knew it, we were now heading further west.

And then I realized that with Walnut Grove being so close to the North Dakota border I said to myself; “it wouldn’t be much of a trek to the other end of the state to see Mount Rushmore. I’ve always wanted to see Mount Rushmore!”

When I shared with Lori the trek I had laid out for our summer vacation thus far: Virginia to New York State; New York State to Detroit; Detroit to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan; the Upper Peninsula of Michigan to the Apostle Islands in Wisconsin; the Apostles Islands in Wisconsin to the Mall of America in Minneapolis, Minnesota; Minneapolis, Minnesota to the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum in Walnut Grove; and Walnut Grove to Mount Rushmore in North Dakota Lori said: “What’s next? The Pacific Northwest?”

In our scripture for this morning Jesus is preparing his disciples for life without his direction. Up until this point the disciples had followed Jesus up and down the hills of Galilee, on the long road to Jerusalem and through the deserts of Judea. They had been in storms that might have drowned them, confronted demons that terrified them and seen miracles that blew their minds.

They had been with Jesus every step of the way as their guide and friend, but the time was coming soon when Jesus’s journey would take him to the cross. He would soon be leaving his fiends behind to continue the adventure; but without his leadership Jesus knew the disciples might just get sidetracked. They, like me, might just keep going all the way to the Pacific Coast...trekking to where they might want to go but not where Jesus would have them go.

For this part of the journey Jesus knows they will need a Guide...an "Advocate," "the Spirit of truth" as he calls it so that the disciples will go where God wants them go. As the Spirit has testified to Jesus' person and mission, the disciples will now take that testimony to the rest of the world. Their task will be daunting because that testimony won't be welcome in a world that is hostile to the truth about Jesus. "They will put you out of the synagogues," Jesus warns in John 16:2-3; "Indeed, an hour is coming," says Jesus, "when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God. And they will do this because they have not known

the Father or me." One couldn't blame the disciples for thinking that heading for the beach and some drinks with umbrellas in them would be a safer use of their time.

Sensing their sorrow and confusion Jesus promises his disciples a new Guide who will help them expand their trekking capacity and keep the big picture in mind. "it's to your advantage," Jesus says, "that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you."

A church signboard I once saw while on vacation in the Finger Lakes of Upstate New York read: *"Sure, you can worship God with a fishing pole in your hand, but when was the last time a walleye told you, 'Your sins are forgiven'?"* The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to remind us that first and foremost our sins have been put to rest on the cross. God's grace, not our sins, define who we are. Homiletics Magazine reminds us that the Holy Spirit helps us conserve a lot of "spiritual energy by understanding that in the path of life, Jesus has done everything for us and before us." The Holy Spirit takes the worry out of life so that we are enabled to do the work God has given us to do.

When I went to Church Summer Camp as a kid I would get a list from the camp of what to pack and what not to bring. Instead of becoming bogged down with too much stuff the camp made sure I came with only that which would provide me with the best camping experience possible. In a similar way the Holy Spirit provides us with all that we need to do the work God has given us to do. The Spirit provides us with a new nature, a new heart. It's like we're a "new creation"! Jesus says, the Spirit will help us to see what true righteousness looks like, using Jesus himself as the model. In John 14:12-14 Jesus says that even though he will be returning to the Father, the Spirit will continue to guide and empower us to do what he has done...even doing greater things.

The Holy Spirit also will help us with the route. While planning our trek across the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and relied upon my Google Maps to plan the way for us. Google Maps is limited with it's knowledge; whereas the Holy Spirit is not. We often make poor route choices because we begin with faulty premises and a poor understanding of the terrain. What the world thinks is important is usually not important. What the world thinks is wise is often pretty foolish. The Spirit will direct us such a way that will help us avoid the foolishness of this world and to help us make better decisions.

And finally, the Holy Spirit Guide will help us with the Truth. The 11th verse of John 16 Jesus says that "when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth." "Truth" is a major theme in John's gospel. In fact, it will be Pontius Pilate who asks the question on the world's mind as they are confronted with Jesus: "What is truth?"

The truth is, however, that Jesus himself is the way, the truth and the life. In other words, if we emulate Jesus, our lives will not be lost. Our lives instead will be lives of integrity, honesty, service, selflessness and humility.

Max Lucado once said; *"the wizard [of Oz] says look inside yourself and find self. God says look inside yourself and find [the Holy Spirit]. The first will get you to Kansas. The latter will get you to heaven."* On this Pentecost Sunday, we remember that when the Holy Spirit arrived, the disciples were launched on a trek they never anticipated. A trek not to the stars nor to the Pacific Ocean via New York, Detroit, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, the Apostles Islands in Wisconsin, the Mall of American in Minneapolis, the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum in Walnut Grove, and Mount Rushmore in South Dakota; but a trek to heaven itself.

Following Jesus has never been about retreating from the world to a tropical island and "getting away from it all." It's always been about following the way, the truth and the life of Jesus for the purpose of changing the world for God's glory. It's a tough adventure, but it's the only destination that ultimately matters.