

Today we talk of journey. As we journey through the Bible we hear many a tale about a journey here or a journey there, and fitting as we approach Lent and we will begin our annual journey of prayer, fasting, giving, and connecting to the deep and amazing gifts of our faith.

Planning the Journey

When I think of journeys I think of travel and I would venture to guess there are two basic types of travelers: planners and free-spirited folks. The planners read books, consult experts and plan every point of their journey while free-spirited people may have some mile markers planned out but allow fate and the moment fill in the rest of their time.

Planning our journey of faith

When we look at our life with Jesus it is easy to look at it in the context of a journey. We have mile markers such as our birth (a miraculous event in itself), our baptism, confirmation and growth in understanding Christ's teachings and learning many of the beautiful traditions of the church. But much of that you did not plan yourself and I would be surprised if many of you have been able to plan every moment of your faith journey with 100% accuracy to your plan. Rather, for most of us God works in wondrous ways and our journey, although planned in its final end, has taken us and will take us in unexpected and amazing paths.

The European-African Swallow

Every year billions of little swallows migrate to and from Europe to Southern Africa. As part of their amazing journey they cross the world's largest desert, the Sahara – a dead wasteland with almost no food, water or shelter. Yet, our little feathered friends go by instinct and amid the Sahara's nothingness these birds come across a picturesque oasis of water and palms. Woe to the sparrows that drink from this small lake as its salt content is several times that of the ocean and thus deadly. But also, in the picturesque death trap are swarms of flies – nasty buzzing flies everywhere. The flies drink the salt water and their bodies process out the salt thus our friends the swallows eat the flies for food and ample hydration as well. When the sparrows needed it most God provides. I love the complex simplicity of it.

Fisher of People

In Jeremiah (Jer 16:16) we read of the pending judgement and God saying, "But now I will send for many fishermen...and they will catch them"

"This passage is about judgment and destruction. This is the background to Jesus' words in the first chapter of Mark. It is not a cozy scene but one shadowed by the serious nature of the mission to which the disciples will soon be called." (Michael Card, Mark, pg. 14) I am sure our simple fishermen also would have realized the

seriousness of this call we read in our Gospel today. They would have realized it and had no idea how the journey would unfold but they knew the call was real. The call was a command to which they had free will to obey, and they did for the salvation of not only their souls but the transformation of the world's souls as well.

Be Open to Hear God's Call

In our faith journey we will often find ourselves doing things we never planned to do or expect to happen. Do you think a life long United Methodist, as I was, ever saw myself standing before you today as an ordained Priest? God's call to His ministry started very early in my life and looking back the signs were everywhere. Others saw it, but all I saw was how it could not be and not how it could. I did not 'let go and let God' but rather forged my own path. God is, if nothing else on these matters of freewill, one patient parent.

Friends, I implore you to find ways to (as Fr. Charles put it last week...**) listen for God's knock in your life.

African Children

Dr Paul O'Reilly tells a story that I think can help us free our minds about what God whispers on your heart and how life often twists and turns in the most amazing ways.

He talked of a friend of his who, after nearly giving up on finding a mate married a good man but after three years of marriage, she learned she would never be able to have children. The news was so devastating she seriously contemplated taking her own life.

Finally settling on faith that God had a plan for her but not knowing what it was she left work and moved back to her African home to try to figure out how to process this terrible lot life has placed upon her.

Back home she was appalled and shocked by the numbers of homeless children in the streets abandoned or orphaned from the pandemic of AIDS.

She eventually came back home to her comfortable life with a heavy heart over the fact she had so much love she could give a child and yet so many children from her home town had nobody to love and care for them. Eventually, after nearly a year of listening to the voice of God on her heart, she and her husband moved back to her home town, started an orphanage and found the child 'X' many hundreds over she wanted.

Conclusion

JONAH: Do you think Jonah, from our first reading, wanted to travel to the largest and most brutal city of his day? NO, and I am sure he did it reluctantly but after his first refusal to listen to God (does a great fish give you a clue?) he went and in so doing saved the entire city.

SWALLOWS: Our friends the swallows had no possible way to complete their journey logically. They had an end destination and the means to navigate there but it was the God made oasis of flies that allowed their journey to succeed.

AFRICAN MOTHER: Our barren wife almost gave up on life knowing she could never produce a child and now she is mother to hundreds. Not only giving love but literally saving young lives and finding true meaning in life by finally listening to God's special call.

GALILEAN FISHERMEN: Our Galilean fishermen certainly did not start their day thinking they would walk away from their work, their families and entire way of life to journey with a man who found them and called out to them. Their day did not start that way, but it did end as such and they became the disciples of Jesus Christ and through their witness and preaching the Good Word literally saved the world including all of us here today!

Listen for God's call my friends and don't be afraid to act even if you don't understand every bit and piece or even the meaning. Have faith and allow yourselves to not only be fishers of men and women but all the children too. AMEN