

Keep Your Eyes Open on the Road

Gospel Tips for Summer Fun #2

John 1: 35-51

June 3, 2018

When I was a child, my family always took a summer road trip. Long trips. My mom's family was out west and summer was the time when we had time to see them. My grandma Beulah and my grandpa Jim lived in Williston, ND. My Grandma's sister Ada lived in Denver and my uncle Ferris lived in southern Colorado. My mom's brothers lived in Tacoma Washington and San Francisco.

Every summer we would drive from northwest Iowa to Williston in northwest North Dakota. It took forever. We'd stay in Williston for a while and then we would usually leave from there to go somewhere else. Sometimes we'd go to Denver and southern Colorado for a reunion or a wedding, or off to visit Yellowstone National Park. One summer we drove on to Tacoma to visit one uncle, then to San Francisco to visit the other, down to Los Angeles to go to Disneyland, then back to San Francisco, to celebrate my uncle's 40th birthday, and then we wound our way home through Nevada, Utah, we stopped in Denver, braved Nebraska and finally returned home. I watched it all from the back seat of a Chevy Celebrity.

I say I watched it all because for the most part I did. As soon as the car started my sister, sitting to my right, would start reading a book. She would only stop for food, bathroom breaks or sleep. I had books with me. I wanted to be a reader, but I was afraid I might miss something out my window. Something new, something interesting, something amazing. I didn't want to miss that moment when I saw something I didn't normally see: a coyote trotting along, a hawk dropping to catch a meal, a sportscar, a famous person passing us (my dad drove slowly on the interstate), the first glimpse of amazing landscapes, the Missouri river valley, the North Dakota badlands, the Rocky Mountains. Maybe we'd see a rattlesnake or a bear.

I would wait patiently, and then not so patiently, telling my family over and over again that I was bored, for those moments that were transformative, that would change my whole impression of the trip. I'd wait for those moments that would change me. I didn't want to miss them. My sister found those moments in books. I found them watching out the window.

I think there are parallels here to the spiritual journey: patiently and not so patiently waiting for those moments for the miraculous and holy to break through to transform your vision, your heart, your life. Staying alert and watching for the Holy to be revealed, but you don't know when and where that might be.

The Gospel of John is famous for statements that have multiple layers of meaning. In today's story, Jesus is calling the first disciples. He has just been baptized by John in the Jordan and John is pointing out that Jesus is the greater of the two. The next day Jesus walks by and John says to two of his disciples, "go," and they start following Jesus without saying anything. Jesus realizes they are there, he turns and says to them, "what are you looking for?" Like a sales associate in Target, but it's a deep question, one of *the* questions, a question for every disciple in every time. "What are you really looking for? Why are you here? Why are you on this journey?"

There are people who study churches and attendance patterns and they've found that when people visit a church, either for the first time or the first time in a long time, it's because they are going through something. They are going through some kind of transition, or facing a crisis of some kind, and they are looking for something: meaning and purpose, comfort, guidance, hope, something transformational.

Those first disciples are looking for transformation in the world, in their lives. Maybe we are looking for transformation in our lives in our world and we wonder if love can do it. To disciples in every time, Jesus says, "Come and see."

The next day Jesus decides he wants to go to Galilee. It turns out that in chapter two Jesus has to be at a wedding in Cana where he'll turn water into wine. It's a long journey, 40 plus miles on foot from Bethany by the Jordan where he is right now. He turns to Philip and says, "follow me." He doesn't mean simply, walk behind me as we go. And he isn't talking only to Philip. He's talking to every disciple in every time and he's saying, "follow me on this journey, on this path, on this way of life. Let's get on the road."

Andrew goes out to find Nathanael, tells him about Jesus and Nathanael says, “can anything good come out of Nazareth? Can love do anything with Nazareth? Andrew says, “Come and see.” See for yourself if love can make a difference. See for yourself what changes in your life. Come and see.”

Jesus meets Nathanael later and does a little hocus pocus to get his attention. Nathanael, the cynical one is impressed. Jesus says, “you will see greater things than these.”

What are you looking for? Follow me. Come and see. You will see greater things than these. Statements about the journey.

Last week we were at the lake and Gospel Tip for summer fun #1 was: in the storm place your trust in love. Gospel tip for summer fun #2 is: keep your eyes open on the road, for you never know when you will meet the Holy.

A few years ago, our family decided we wanted to visit Redwood National Park in Northern California. We decided our family was old enough to take this epic road trip. We had a plan to put in long driving days while we were excited, get to the Redwoods as quickly as possible and then relax when we were there. That was a great strategy for the first day when we were excited. The trouble is that we only made it to Butte, MT, and the next day our plan was to put in an equally big day. We started exhausted and grumpy, and we stayed that way for 12 hours in the car. At the end of a long day, we are approaching Portland. Everyone is fighting. I’m driving a van full of misery down the interstate. To stay on schedule we need to drive through Portland drive for another hour and then find a place to stay. I’m losing my sense of the point of the trip. Not staying on schedule but having a good time. We are losing hope, wondering if this journey is a good idea.

Sara is scouring the atlas and doing research and she says, “Multnomah Falls is coming up. We have to stop.” “We can’t! We shouldn’t! We won’t!” I say. “Clara, Simon, Ruthie, don’t you want to stop at this waterfall coming up? It is one of the most famous waterfalls in the United States.” No.

Well, we stopped. That's how things roll in our family. Some of us protested by staying in the van and then we eventually came out. The falls were majestic, amazing, incredibly beautiful. The beauty of falls and the constant sound of the water splashing washed away our fatigue and anger. It reoriented me about the purpose of the trip. It took a little longer for some of us, but we left renewed, able to stay in the van with one another until we found a place to rest for the night.

The next day we were supposed to arrive at Redwood National Park in the early afternoon. Early afternoon came and went, and we weren't there. 2:00 p.m. 3:00p.m. nothing. We were driving along winding roads. We were starting to think the Redwood forest was a mythical place. On the map, but not really there. Our impatience, our arguing, our bickering grew, the van was noisy. There was lively fighting going in five directions, and then, The forest was dark, the trees were tall, and everyone was quiet. We all started paying attention. We stayed in the park a week. The magnificent trees transformed our state of mind, our spirit, our feeling about the whole trip, and maybe even our lives after we left.

What are you looking for? Follow Me. Come and see. You will see greater things than these. Keep your eyes open on the road for you never know when you will encounter the holy.

The life of discipleship is a long road, a long journey. There will be moments available to us to stop and remember that the Holy is all around us. There will be moments available to us to be renewed and restored and to remember the point and purpose of our journey.

There will be moments when the Holy will overwhelm us with its presence. Moments when we will see greater things than we were expecting, moments that grab our hearts, hold them, change them. Those moments won't last long, but they will change us. They will change how we see the past, present, and the future.

What are you looking for? Follow me. Come and see what love can do. You will see greater things than these. Keep your eyes open on the road, for you never know when you will meet the holy. Amen.