

“The Detour is the Road”

Second in a Series

Acts 11:1-13

May 9, 2021

Pastor Jenothy Irvine

Prayer: Remind us once again, O Lord, you know the way, you know the why, and you know the when of this our walk of faith.

Message

I couldn't believe my eyes. I was downtown in a local antique shop when I saw a map of guess where? Wyoming. My heart jumped like it does when you see something that brings fond memories and strong connections. But that was not the source of my shock and disbelief. Rather it was the fact that there was a ten dollar price tag on the map. Ten bucks for a map someone picked up for free at a gas station. Probably while traveling through Wyoming and got lost. A map my parents had multiple copies of when I was growing up. One for the car. One for dad's truck. One for the camper. And one up at the cabin in case you needed to find the name of some dirt road you were on.

It was a strong reminder that I couldn't possibly be getting older, but rather that paper maps are going the way of black and white TVs, VHS tapes, and dvds. How many of you have a paper map right now in your vehicle? How many of you under the age of 50 have a paper map in your vehicle right now? Many would say we are at the point of simply not needing them anymore. But are we there yet? Will paper maps someday be something we only see in antique stores and museums?

“Not so fast,” says Joel Minster, chief cartographer for Rand McNally, the nation’s largest mapmaker. “I don’t think paper maps are going anywhere, but people are using them differently, more as a companion to the online or digital version.” Despite the ease and convenience of technology, batteries go dead, spilled coffee can fry a GPS unit, or you may be in a place that has a weak signal or no signal at all. Not to mention, GPS is sometimes just wrong.

Case in point, last Thursday, my women’s book study group met at the Benedictine Inn and Retreat center in Beechgrove, 25 min. up the road. I was rerouted and it took about 10 min longer than necessary, and one poor woman was rerouted and it took her two hours to get there! Mind you, all of us put in the same address into the GPS on our phones. I ended up on my way to the airport and she found herself sitting in an empty parking lot next to a large industrial construction site. I know of another instance where using a gps to get to a particular church will take you to the backside of the property, where the road ends and you are acres away from the church building.

All this to say, I have to agree with chief cartographer Minster, that paper maps remain a valuable tool that show you possible routes, possible shortcuts, and a wider view of where you are going. Where a GPS is screaming “recalculating,” a paper map will quietly show you *all* the possible ways to get there that you may not have considered.

I wonder if those first apostles ever thought they were being rerouted or detoured to places unknown and unexpected. I wonder if they ever thought their travels would leave us a map of sorts showing us not only where they went and

how they got there, but where and how God was moving in the life of the early church and how it wasn't always the course *their* GPS had planned out!

Read text: Acts 11:1-13

We shared last week that the book of Acts reads like a travelogue for first-century Christianity. It is a roadmap of the spread of the gospel and we shared what is called, "The Macedonian Call." Acts is also a spiritual map outlining the direction God was taking the early church. In today's text, when Peter goes to Joppa and eats with the Gentile Roman Centurion Cornelius, the other apostles and believers in the group think he has walked off the map - he didn't follow the intended or agreed upon route. Their voice of criticism sounded like that of a disgruntled GPS system calling for Peter to recalculate and get back on track with their original GPS coordinates, which was limited to and only about the way and law of God's chosen people, the Jews.

Peter explains to them that God had shown him the context of a much larger map that revealed the new road God was building toward inclusion of the Gentiles, the outsiders, in the church. Peter took another road and found that the Holy Spirit was there all along.

God's command to Peter was essentially to march off the long-held maps that Peter and his people walked for thousands of years - to trust the detour; learn from it, and recognize the value of the experience. God's vision to Peter was carving out a new route that would bring Jews and Gentiles together.

Because Peter marched off the old route, he begins to see how God's plan for the whole world is unfolding like a huge gas station map. Cornelius had also received a vision from God which altered *his* maps as a Roman centurion and a citizen who likely had seen a lot of the world. The Holy Spirit sent Peter, a Jew, and Cornelius, a Gentile, off their prescribed routes to meet each other as an example of the new route God was showing the church. No longer would Jews and Gentiles run separate paths but they would serve the same Lord as part of the same church. I wonder if that would preach in today's church? :)

Now it seems to me, at this point in the route of the sermon for today, I have two ways to go with the text. So I will mention one and we'll go the other this time.

1. I can tell you it's time for those of who follow Jesus and claim to be God's church to stop thinking their route, path, trail, or GPS is the only way to do and be church and start realizing God has a much bigger map. OR
2. I can tell you that sometimes on our journey of faith, the detour is the road. So goes the lyrics of a new song I recently heard.

The detour is the road. It's on the detour we are our most vulnerable individually and communally, and we discover that can be our strength. It's on the detour we feel the most out of control, lost, or disoriented and discover that's exactly where we need to be for God to teach us, use us, shape us and show us the truth. It's on the detour we come to see a path forward or a passage through that was not visible any other way. It is the detour that teaches us more about ourselves, others, and more about God. It is the detour that often brings us back to center, transforms our perspective, broadens our understanding, shows us a better way, and opens the eyes of our mind and the ears of our heart to the fullness of God.

We have all had detours in life. I wasn't supposed to be a preacher, I was going to teach just like Miss Erickson, my 2nd grade, all time favorite teacher. I wasn't supposed to be a pastor, I had plans if the teaching gig didn't work, of being a missionary. I wasn't supposed to go to seminary, I had a nanny job in upstate New York all lined up. I wasn't supposed to move to Indiana, I didn't even know places like Terre Haute or Franklin existed.

I *was* supposed to go to Alaska as a youth leader for a mission trip, instead I shattered my ankle sliding into 3rd base two weeks before the trip and learned how to grow through disappointment and pain. I was supposed to land my first church right after seminary graduation, instead I learned the gift of patience and the wisdom of timing. I was supposed to...I planned on...but God had something else in mind and used the detours to show me just how big God's map is and how small mine sometimes tends to be.

It's in the detours that God does God's best work.

The past 16 months in some ways has been one big detour; for families, businesses, churches, schools, friendships, significant relationships, you name it and it probably had to make a detour this past year and a half. I think we vastly under-estimate the emotional, spiritual, and mental toll such a detour can take on all of us. AND I think we vastly under-estimate what God has been teaching, revealing, growing, prioritizing, and transforming along the way

Church, we have to be like Peter, and trust the movement of the Holy Spirit. We have to get out of our own way and trust God knows what to do and how to do it. We have to open the whole map, take the detours, and let go of those internal

navigation systems that hold us back, block others out, or otherwise limit God's Holy Spirit. Church, we have to trust, the detour is the road.

No matter the detour your life has taken in the past or right now, trust that God knows the why. Have hope in what you are learning and how you are becoming. Detours are not always easy or fun; they don't always make sense at the time, but as we see from the life of Peter and so many others of the early church, they are a part of our spiritual map.

The following lyrics, I think, say it best...

The Detour is the Road by Sarah Kroger and Savannah Locke

Verse 1]

Don't let my (our) hearts grow cold or despise the wait

This is not unkindness, this is not disgrace

I (we are) am not passed over in my (our) suffering

You (God) hold my (our) broken heart and my (our) broken dreams

[Pre-Chorus]

Your love has held me (us) warmly through the night

And I (we) have seen Your faithfulness with my (our) own eyes

[Verse 2]

I will not pretend that it comes easily

To follow when I'm sure I know what's best for me

I've got lots of questions but I know the truth

That I have never lived a day apart from You

[Pre-Chorus]

And somehow every unexpected climb
Makes Your goodness that much harder to deny

[Bridge]

This time will not be wasted
All the sorrow I (we) have tasted
You (God) sing hope across the valley of my (our) tears
Sometimes love looks like delay
But You walk me (us) through the wait
And I (we are) am learning laughter even here
You are with me (us) here

[Chorus]

You've been good to me, I am (we are) safe to hope
I (we) will dare to believe when the way is long and slow
You've been good to me, I am (we are) safe to hope
I (we) will dare to believe when the way is long and slow
And I am (we are) full of doubt but You are kind and close
And I (we) will trust (But You are kind)
Oh, I (we) will trust (Oh, I will trust)
The detour is the road
(It's the road, yes, it's the road)
The detour is the road

May it be so - Amen