

## JESUS THE WANDERER

Luke 9:57 - 10:2

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(online worship only)

Remember the scene at the end of “The Wizard of Oz”? Dorothy says goodbye to the Tin Man, the Scarecrow and the Cowardly Lion, she clicks three times the heels of her ruby slippers while she says to herself, “There’s no place like home, there’s no place like home...”. The Good Witch sprinkles a little magic over her and in a few seconds she’s back in her old bedroom in Kansas, **back home**.

How many times have you said that? “There’s no place like home.” It’s a regular mantra for Doug and me. We have had the good fortune to travel to many beautiful and interesting places, and while we’re there, we’ll say to each other, “what would it be like to live here?” We talk about the pros and cons, and then - inevitably - we’ll talk about what we love about living right here. The cost of living, the lack of traffic, access to the arts and sports, a great lake and parks. It’s home.

In the best of situations, home is where we feel comfortable and safe. It’s true that for much of this year many of us have missed travel, and camaraderie with work colleagues, and going to concerts, movies and restaurants - but still we have appreciated our homes more than ever. Most people I’ve talked to tell me how much they enjoy working from home. And most of us have the privilege of living in homes that are quite comfortable.

We know that Jesus grew up in the town of Nazareth, in the Galilee region, but where did he live during his three year ministry? Unless I’ve missed something, I don’t believe that there is a single line in all of the gospels that says, “And after a long hard day of ministry, Jesus went home and put his feet up.” After he gives his very first

sermon in his home synagogue of Capernaum, we never hear another word about Jesus spending time at home. He spends the night in boats, in the desert, in the wilderness, in the mountains. He seems to find a sense of comfort in the home of his friends Mary and Martha. But otherwise, Jesus spends his ministry on the move.

Our passage for today is part of a long section of the gospel of Luke that is called a travel narrative. Eventually Jesus will end up in Jerusalem, but he gets there by criss-crossing several regions multiple times. Read through this section of Luke and you see phrases like this one in chapter 10, "While Jesus and his disciples were traveling..." In chapter 13, we read, "Jesus traveled through cities and villages, teaching..." and then he says, "It's necessary for me to travel today, tomorrow and the next day..." and in chapter 14, "Large crowds were traveling with Jesus." You get the idea. Jesus is on the move. There's no talk of home, or comfort, or the comforts of home.

And he expects his disciples to travel with him, to leave behind their attachments to family and possessions and be focused, as he is, on the mission at hand: telling people about a different way of life, the Kingdom of God, the Reign of God.

It's a way of life that is demanding; it requires that we reorient ourselves, that we center our lives around our ultimate purpose, our ultimate calling.

Sometimes when you read the gospels you have the feeling that people in the crowds envied the twelve disciples - the disciples were looked at as Jesus' closest fan base; they got to be close to Jesus, they spent the most time with him, and so other people clamored to become disciples too.

Our passage for today starts with a person like that. "As Jesus and his disciples traveled along the road, someone said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.'"

In other words, "I want to be a disciple too."

Jesus looks at this person and says, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but I have no place to lay my head.”

What is Jesus saying? He’s saying, you need to know what you’re signing up for. Being my disciple is not a 40-hour-a-week job that will let you go home every night and watch Netflix. It demands more of you than that.

Other people raise their hands, then. “I’ll be your disciple, Jesus, but first I have some things to take care of.” Jesus is rather harsh in this passage. “Don’t even think about following me unless you have what it takes. Are you ready to be totally dependent on the hospitality of others, as I am?” “Are you ready to pay attention to God’s claim on your life and let that be your first priority?”

Can anyone really follow Jesus if that’s the job description? Is it possible to learn to put God at the center of our lives?

I don’t know anyone who does it perfectly, but here’s what I’ve observed. The people who value what God values are also the people who seem most content. They have lives that seem purposeful. Jesus isn’t saying that we can’t **love** our families and our homes; he is saying that **sometimes** we begin to **worship** our families and our possessions. We obsess about becoming more and more secure, about keeping our family members happy no matter what.

People who put **discipleship** at the center of their lives focus their attention on bringing more love and justice into the world. I know families where the children grew up side by side with foster children, learning a lot about sharing and empathy. I think of families where the children grew up having conversations around the dinner table about treating others with dignity and respect, where the parents modeled radical acceptance for those who are different. I look at people who give sacrificially of their time, talent and treasure; those who take a week’s vacation to accompany a mission trip. There are

members of this church who teach me about discipleship - those on fixed incomes who are some of our largest givers, those who find joy in making meals for others, those who spend their days volunteering at the Thrift Shop.

When we give up the worship of our own comfort and pleasure, we begin to learn what Jesus meant by abundant life.

Our passage from Luke goes on to tell us that Jesus **DOES** decide to expand his circle of disciples. He commissions 72 other people and sends them out into towns and villages; they are like advance teams, helping to prepare places for when Jesus will come to visit himself. These 72 people will be totally dependent on the hospitality of strangers. There's no expense account for these workers, no company credit card or hotel loyalty program, not even a list of homes where someone might know someone. They are on their own, completely dependent.

I don't know about you, but this is what I think would have been most difficult about following Jesus in that time. Not the wandering, not the traveling - that's kind of adventuresome - but the **dependence**. Or, more to the point, the **lack of independence**.

Isn't that one of the aspects of our lives today that is most challenging? As we are in our own time of wandering, in this wilderness for which there is no map and certainly no itinerary - we have no idea when we'll be out of it - we have lost our independence, we have lost any semblance of control. What do you mean I can't work out of my office? What do you mean I can't travel anywhere I want? We always thought that if we had the **means**, we would certainly have the **freedom**. But that's not the case right now.

One writer put it this way, in a book written long before the word "coronavirus" came into our vocabulary. He said, "The people of God have often been described as

**pilgrims**, but a better metaphor is the word ‘**nomad**.’ **Pilgrims know** where their journey is headed. **Nomads** are called to go by **uncertain** paths. The disciples lived as nomads - traveling all over, living in often frightening and hostile circumstances.”

Perhaps we are living somewhat like nomads today. Yes, we have physical homes, but so much else is uncertain.

Could it be that one thing we are learning in this time is empathy for those who are **real** nomads? Those who are homeless? Those who are refugees? Those who have been expelled from their homelands?

Could it be that one thing we are learning in this time is that we never were in as much control as we thought we were?

The gospel of Luke ends its travel narrative in Jerusalem, at the foot of the cross, where Jesus joins us fully in our humanity. He gives up all control. He submits fully to God’s claim on his life; he literally dies for the values he holds dear, God’s values, God’s plan for a more loving and just world. And he comes out the other side.

Perhaps that is the promise of the gospel - not that we can be in control, but that God in Jesus joins us in the midst of our wandering chaos, holds onto us, and brings us to the other side.

Doug and I were walking one day last week and he asked me what this sermon was going to be about, we were talking about this series, and he jokingly said, “How can someone who doesn’t camp write a series of sermons about camping?”

It’s true that I’m not a camper these days, but I have camped. I have spent nights out under the stars. I have experienced what happens when you leave the comforts of home, when life becomes simpler, more stripped down to its essentials. You notice the things that matter most. You appreciate the taste of a good meal after a

day of hiking. You notice the fresh air you're breathing. You look up at the night sky, no distractions.

The same thing can happen to us in times of life crisis or change. We stop worrying so much about peripheral concerns and notice the things that matter most. Our lives become re-centered, re-oriented.

We are wandering through a time that is uncertain. We are joining ranks with people whose lives have always felt precarious. We are identifying more with Jesus who left home so that he could pursue his life's calling. We are remembering that God is with us, and that divine presence is our ultimate home. Amen.