

Mark 6:1–13

Highway 15 and I have become well acquainted over the past year. And although the road has been challenging at times, it has also given me sufficient time for reflection to and from Gettysburg. In fact, just last week while travelling south, I was reminded of my childhood and how hard we worked bringing in the crops. The saying, “You have to make hay while the sun shines,” is absolutely true.

Our hay came in small rectangular bales, not the large square or round ones we usually see lying in the fields. Dad made it so the bales were loose enough and small enough for our little fingers to ply under the twine which was strung around the bales. As 8 and 10 year olds we would stack the bales on the wagon, unload them on to a conveyor belt, and then restack them in the barn no matter how hot and humid.

Smiling in reminiscence, I thought about the farm and the dairy cattle – our main source of income. I remember around milking time, one or two of us would walk out to the pasture to bring the cows home. There was many a brisk morning as dew glistened on the ground reflecting the rising sun or hot summer evenings with dust particles filling the air. Whether grazing on the hillside, lying in the shade of an apple tree, or sipping slowly out of the pond, these lovely black and white cows never gave us trouble. Instead they thoughtfully obliged our urgings to come home as they sashayed down the path, one after the other, hooves a dancin’ and tails a waggin’. Slowly, chewing their cud without a care in the world they would walk as slowly as you can imagine and always in single file.

It was this constant travel on the path which eventually pounded the dirt solid creating steep walled edges deep under the grass. The paths were fairly straight and often so narrow that smaller feet found it easier to walk the path. Back and forth the cows walked, to the barnyard and back out to the pasture again. Cows rarely veered off the path, which always, safely guided them to their destination.

Our lives are not quite so orderly. The path we are on is seldom straight and not so clearly marked. In fact, we probably walk a pattern more fitting to the road construction in Camp Hill as Highway 15 continues its transformation. We are forced to maneuver the confusing lanes and temporary roads, not unlike the twists and turns in our daily lives. We drive our cars snuggled up against the cement walls, avoiding crossing over the yellow lines, mirroring our own journeys in life which are not always smooth, consistent, or apparent either.

In the midst of our travels, we may take detours or challenging turns– changing the direction of our future. This is what happened to my husband and me. A few years ago, we thought we had a pretty clear idea of where our road was leading. You might say we were settled in our routine. But as time progressed, our dreams changed. Through divine intervention I felt God’s presence as I observed one Christmas Eve, the preciousness of a child with a lighted candle singing Silent

Night. In the last moments I spent with my dad after he succumbed to Leukemia the Holy Spirit wrapped me in God's arms comforting and strengthening me.

With such extreme and different perspectives on life, the following months, were a turning point for me as I struggled with what to do next. Searching for wisdom, I knelt in our garden working among the flowers, drawing closer to God and feeling compelled to follow a voice, a new direction, a change in plans. Guided by a light of joy and promise I took the path leading me to Gettysburg Seminary and in a year my first call as a pastor.

For some of us there comes a time we realize our dream is different from that which we have been clinging. A time we must step out of our normalcy and search for that which will make life more beautiful and more meaningful; not only for us but also for those whose paths we will cross.

Change can be a good thing as depicted in the movie, *Cheaper by the Dozen*. Steve Martin, a Father of 12, hands in his resignation. His decision to not remain in his dream job of coaching one of the greatest football teams ever prompts the Athletic Director to retort, "So you are giving up your DREAM?" To which Martin replies, "Just going with a different one."

That is precisely what happened to us. Our dream to retire and build a home in the northern part of Minnesota on 40 acres in the Chippewa Forrest became part of a longer path. We may still get there, but not until we make a few more stops and turns along the way. Changing direction can truly be a blessing when we know in our hearts this is from God. Because God has bigger plans for each of us. When there is room to grow, God commissions us to do bigger and better things for OTHERS not just for ourselves. Sometimes it requires making sacrifices or subjecting ourselves and our families to change.

The disciples understood this when Jesus sent them on their journey. Leaving everything behind, even their money bag and extra clothing, they carried on with Christ's work. This is part of our Christian discipleship. We may have to leave behind the plastic in our pocketbooks, take no luggage, and forget other material things as well.

And in its stead we need only carry with us our "spiritual sensitivity" to the needs of the world – these needs are as varied as the people who respond to them. Walking the path unique to who we are fulfills the many and various quests.

Interwoven are the threads of the many lives that we encounter along the way, as we realize the privilege of being chosen by God. Jeremiah (29.11) speaks to every one of us, "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." Each one of us is unique to God, chosen for opportunities and challenges God knows we can manage.

We, like the disciples, come from various and ordinary professions and we, like the disciples are given extraordinary tasks. The path may not be straight; indeed it may be a little like a construction zone. Not always painless, and often perilous, all in the course of helping others. We may come face to face with conflict, hostility, or danger, and at the very least we might be

subjected to adversaries and antagonists. God tells us to pick ourselves up by the bootstraps and “stand up on our feet,” so that God can speak to us. We, like Ezekiel, are commissioned.

Most of us live comfortably compared to many throughout this world. Steeped in rich heritage, we cannot celebrate the 4th of July without remembering those who have fallen on hallowed grounds by the thousands so that we can enjoy this kind of life; men and women who risked their lives then and continue to do so throughout the generations. We remember our military, emergency responders, police, and missionaries as they defend our freedom and exhibit God’s love through their compassion.

And this is how we extend ourselves. With our many gifts and talents, we put our trust and faith in God knowing that God’s grace is sufficient. With God’s word as a lamp unto our feet, we can respond to all of God’s requests through scripture, devotion, and prayer no matter how difficult the journey becomes.

Among the spiritual disciplines available to guide us, the prayer labyrinth is special to me. Thanks to your financial and prayerful support, my project, the Labyrinth is now a reality. My year at Trinity is similar to that of the labyrinth. Walking with you has put perspective in my life, as I sought direction, and brought thanksgiving to God. Just as the center of the labyrinth connects our most inner self with God, so I have found comfort being part of your community. Now that I leave Trinity, in retracing my steps like that of a labyrinth, I am filled with new awareness and new energy.

Through encouragement and support you helped me discover my weaknesses and my strengths. Yours is a generosity I will never forget. Thank you for taking this walk with me. I truly hope you will discover the intimacy of the labyrinth allowing it to be part of your spiritual stroll with God...because God’s grace is sufficient for you. Amen.