



“Lost”

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday & Sunday, September 7-8, 2019

All Services

The Reverend Elizabeth E. Frey
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Luke 14:25-33

I love visiting our country's national parks! What I've come to discover as I visited more and more of the national parks is there are the beaten paths where everyone goes. Tourist traps where cars clog up the roads; nature seems to be disturbed. These are places full of people and noise. I think of Skyline Drive in Shenandoah, Old Faithful at Yellowstone, Going-to-the-Sun Road in Glacier. These places are beautiful, totally worth the visit, but I always long to find respite in these places. I want to find the less traveled places, the quiet places away from the tourist noise and traffic.

So, one time at Shenandoah National Park, I decided to find just this place. At one of the many overlooks, there is a path with a sign and a small trail that looks like it heads down into a valley. As I walked down the trail, the car noises from Skyline Drive started to go away; the sounds of birds and the breeze were all I could hear. And before I knew it, the trail wasn't really a trail anymore. And as I came to a fork in the trail, there was no trail marker.

Now if my parents taught me anything as a child, you always follow the trail markers. At this fork I had three choices, go right, go left, or turn around so I wouldn't get lost. Guess what I picked? Not getting lost; it was time to turn around.

We all come to these moments in our lives where a fork is in the road. Do we go right? Do we go left? Do we turn around? These fork in the road moments come with big decisions. Decisions that affect our lives in enormous ways. One decision may lead us to get lost. Another might lead us onto a beautiful journey.

In both of our readings for today, there are fork in the road moments for those who hear the words of Moses and the words of Jesus. In Deuteronomy, Moses and God's people stand before the land promised to their ancestors by God. What we heard earlier is part of Moses' farewell speech to God's people. They will cross over into this land, but Moses will not. He will die before God's people arrive, so Moses' words are meant to encourage, but also remind the Israelites that they have come to a fork in the road – a fork in their journey to this promised land. Love God or turn back. Walk in the ways of God or turn back. Choose life or turn back. This is the fork in the road for the Israelites.

And in Luke, Jesus speaks to the crowds that have been following him on his journey: a journey of preaching, teaching, and healing. Now with his journey set to Jerusalem and his death on the cross, Jesus speaks plainly to these crowds. He tells them that following

him will not be an easy road. It might mean division in their family. It might mean sacrifice, giving up possessions. And Jesus knowing his own fate, it might mean death. Now is their fork in the road: follow Jesus or turn back.

These forks in the road for the Israelites and Jesus' followers were not easy decisions. These were not choices taken lightly. It's kind of like the choice given to Neo in the movie *The Matrix* between the red pill or the blue pill. The red pill will reveal the truth to him, and the blue pill will return him to his former life unaware of anything that has already happened to him. Just as Neo leans to grab one of the pills, Morpheus, Laurence Fishburne's character reminds Neo that this isn't a choice to take lightly.

And neither is ours. We like the Israelites and the crowds following Jesus in our stories for today; we too are called to love God, to walk in God's ways, to choose life. We too need to hear the words of Jesus today.

I like to file Jesus' teachings and stories in imaginary file folders titled according to how they make me feel and I file this story under the title, "Ugh, Jesus" because I don't like what Jesus has to say to me. I am convicted by these words. This is tough stuff to hear.

I imagine there were people that day who heard Jesus who said, "What did he just say?" Or people refused to even hear. People who put their fingers in their ears. People who said, "Hey, Jesus! We're not sure we get what you're saying." People who pretended they didn't understand what Jesus. People who asked, "Following this guy means what...?"

There are still people today who say, ask, and do the same things when Jesus speaks to them. And guess what, friends? We are those people. We put our fingers in our ears when Jesus speak to us. We ignore what Jesus asks of us, calls us to do. We pretend we don't understand what Jesus is telling us.

But, friends, Jesus is clear. Following Jesus isn't going to be easy. Following Jesus is full of making tough decisions. What Jesus calls us into is not something we should take lightly. Because like those following Jesus in Luke's gospel, we learn that following Jesus might mean standing up for what is right, just and good. People may turn their backs on us for standing up for these things. Following Jesus might mean sacrifice, giving up the things that get in the way of our relationship with God and other human beings: our money, our possessions.

And guess what, friends? There will be moments in our lives when we come to forks in the road, and we choose the path that gets us lost. We choose the path that takes away from what Jesus calls us to. We deliberately ignore Jesus. We don't always stand up for what is right, just and good. We follow the crowd leading us elsewhere, not Jesus; we follow the popular opinion. We refuse to let go of earthly things. We mess up big time, friends.

And yet, we are still loved. Because at those forks in the road stands God with us. God doesn't let us walk down those lost roads alone. God trudges along beside us, whispering in our ears: "I am with you, beloved child. Follow me." We don't always choose God's ways or walk down God's paths, but the good news here, friends is God

does choose us. No matter how lost we become, we aren't alone. Like the Israelites, we may wander. We may walk in circles. Like Jesus' followers, we don't always understand what he's teaching us. We get lost and we get confused, but we aren't alone. God is always with us, loving us, and calling us back again and again. Amen.

Copyright © 2019, Elizabeth E. Frey. All rights reserved.



www.trinitycamphill.org