

Knox Presbyterian Church

January 17, 2010

Readings: 1 Samuel 3: 1-10; Psalm 40: 1-11; Hebrews 12: 1-3; John 1: 43 - 51

Message: *The Waypoints of Life*

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Bless O God the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts, and when we go from this place - help us to continue to hear and to see, and to do and be - all that you would have us hear and see and do and be. We ask it in the name of the blessed one - Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

The scripture that we heard read this morning speaks to us about finding direction in our life. In the reading from the Hebrew scriptures we see the boy Samuel who hears a voice calling his name and he assumes that it must be Eli who is calling him but in reality it was God. It's easy to think one thing but find out later it's something completely different. Context can make a world of difference.

In our reading from the Psalms, the psalmist writes, "I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure." Many of us have probably experienced times like the psalmist, times when we have felt so lost and can't make sense of anything, like we have fallen into the desolate pit. In times like those, we may even find it difficult to put one foot in front of the other or find our footing to climb out of the pit. There may be times when we know that we can't do it on our own and we need help.

In our reading from the epistle, the writer of Hebrews says, "since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us." If we compare the way we live our life to an olympic race, we have to look at the way we train and what are the things that distract us from reaching the finish line?

And in our Gospel reading, we see Jesus calling Philip as a follower and Philip inviting Nathanael to come see Jesus. This is one of my favourite passages because it's so simple. Philip says, "come and see". After all there is no better way to convince someone of anything than to come and see for yourself.

All of these scriptures put together got me to thinking this week about our journey in life and my question for myself and for you today is what do you think is the difference in how a person of faith meets the challenges of life than a person without faith?

Life is a series of events, times of great joy but also of great sorrow. Many of you know me but for those who don't I work in a seniors care facility as a chaplain and a director of volunteers. I meet people at the last stages of their lives. By the time many of them come to us they have already suffered many losses. The obvious losses are the loss of their health, their home, and often a spouse or family members. How people accept those losses vary a lot - sometimes I see people who have accepted their life with grace and gratitude and other times I see people who are bitter and struggling with where they are and others are just lost.

As we look at the different ways we find direction in our life I would like to share an analogy with you. There is a popular worldwide activity called geocaching. Has anyone heard of it? When you geocache you are finding something that someone else has hidden. You go to a geocaching website on the computer and it shows you where all the geocaches are wherever you are. Then you take your GPS and enter the coordinates which will take you to the area where the cache is. The coordinates are called waypoints. The waypoint is how we find the cache. My analogy today is that as we experience living we all have waypoints that help us find direction or reach our goal. What we need to ask ourselves is what are the waypoints in our life? What gives us stability and direction in our living? We need to name those waypoints and focus on them, just like the athlete in the letter to the Hebrews... trains to reach the finish line.

I'd like to explore a few of those waypoints with you today. One of the waypoints that is very important in my life is my friends and my family. When I'm not sure of something or my spirit is feeling a bit low about something, I seek my friends and family. They will often give me words of encouragement or help me to discern something that I need to work through. I invite you to think for a moment of some of your friends and family that you seek out when you're not sure of something or your spirit is a bit. Who are those people and what do they do for you that no one else can do? They are a waypoint for you.

My faith is a waypoint for me. When I am struggling I turn in prayer to God and I wait like the psalmist says, "I waited patiently for the LORD, he inclined to me and heard my cry." Because of my experience of God in the past I know that God will answer my prayer. It may not be as I expect but it often comes in the form of words from someone else - perhaps from my friends or my family, or it may be in the words of a complete stranger or even the words of a song. The important part is that I am waiting and seeking direction.

Another waypoint which is closely connected to the first two is the Christian community. If you have been involved in the church for long I would suspect that the close friends that you named in the first waypoint are probably part of your church community. When we seek direction from others it is important to seek people who are knowledgeable in God's word and people who can walk with us and understand the journey. Your minister is a good starting point and she can give you direction, possibly by offering material for you to read or perhaps some leads for professional advice in a certain area. As you draw closer together you can pray together and seek God's direction together.

Prayer is another waypoint for us in our journey. When we are confused or not sure of what the next step is, we stop and we pray, and we wait and sometimes we even have to step out in faith. When Samuel and Eli finally realized that it was God who was speaking to Samuel and then Samuel heard God's message that he then had to relay to Eli it was not an easy task as God's message for Eli was a message of judgement. Samuel knew that Eli would not like this message but he knew he had to speak it anyways. The journey we walk will not always be easy. In fact, we are pretty much guaranteed that our journey will not be easy.

One of the realizations that I have made as I work with people at the end of their lives is that it doesn't really matter what our trials are. We all have them even though they may vary for different people. The important thing for all of us is how what we do with them, how we respond to them.

We've all heard this week about the devastation in Haiti and many people have asked why. Why would something like this happen to a people who already have so little? I dropped into work this week on one of my day's off to pick up something and I connected with one of my volunteers who I don't see often because she comes in on one of the days I'm not there. She said

to me, "Ruth, can I ask you a question?" Oh, whenever anyone says that I figure its pretty important and so I said, "yeah, I guess so". She said, "why would God allow this devastation in Haiti?" That is the unanswerable question for so much in our world. There is a lot of pain and suffering in our world and this week all we have to do is turn on the TV to see it. I could't answer why but I could confirm God's presence in the midst of the suffering and God's presence in the support of the world to the people in Haiti.

There is another part about the geocaching activity that I would like to share with you. When you find a cache which actually is usually a small container which has a log book where you put the date and sign your name and there will be a few other items that people trade if they want. The rule is if you take something out of the cache you leave something else. That's a pretty good rule for life isn't it? If you take something you give something. The other thing that you might find in the cache is something that is called a geocoin. A geocoin has a serial number on it and the idea behind the geocoin if you take it out of the cache you will move it on to another cache for someone else to find as soon as you can and you record on the geocaching website that you've taken it and where you eventually place it.

For me, the geocoin is like our faith when we share it or pass it on to another person. The geocoin is like the response of Canadians and other countries to the people in Haiti. The challenge for us today in our readings is to ask ourselves, what have we received and what can we share with others? Philip says to Nathanael, "Come and see". Are there people in our lives that see God through us by the way we handle the challenges in our lives? Do they see something different in us?

Let us pray,

Loving and Gracious God, thank you for all that you have given us. We thank you for the waypoints in our lives. Help us never to take those waypoints for granted and help us to keep our eyes focused on you as we journey through our lives in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.