

Series: Resurrection!

May 14, 2017

Title: The Journey

[Slide 1]

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:29-34

Lost?

Getting lost:

Have you ever gotten lost – I mean *really* lost? Maybe you were on a hike and took a wrong turn or lost the trail. One minute you knew where you were and where you were going. The next minute you realized that you had no idea what to do next!

The stages of getting lost:

Getting lost doesn't happen all at once. It's – as they say – a process. The process of getting truly lost happens in stages:

- **Denial:** The first stage of getting lost happens while we still think we know where we are and where we are going. Nobody *tries* to get hopelessly lost. Even if we know we've made a wrong turn in the woods, we still think we can find our way back to the trail. We're not *lost!*
- **Panic:** The second stage of getting lost is panic. Panic sets in when we can no longer deny that we don't know where we are or where we're going. The adrenaline starts flowing big time. We stop thinking and start reacting. No good decisions are going to come out of being in a panic.
- **Adherence to an invented plan:** The third stage of getting lost involves coming up with a panic-driven plan for getting un-lost. The problem with this plan is that it has no basis in reality: We don't actually know where we are, so how on earth can we devise a plan for continuing the journey? All we do in this phase is get more lost. Denial on steroids!
- **Deterioration:** The fourth stage finds us breaking down. We get wet and cold; we shiver all night in the woods with nothing to eat. The world is beginning to close in on us.

- **Resignation or Resolve?** The last stage determines whether we will get out of this situation or not. Will we give up or get going? Will we decide that there is no hope, or will we decide to accept our situation and begin doing the things that will help us survive and eventually get “found.”

Lost in the wilderness:

Paul wrote his letter to the Christians in the city of Corinth for just this purpose: to help them get “found.” They had begun the faith journey out of a world that they knew very well – the world of paganism in the old creation. They were headed to God’s New Creation. God’s Spirit was leading them on this Exodus journey, just as He had lead Israel through the desert on their journey to the Promised Land.

But something had happened along the way. Some of the travelers had made a wrong turn and had wandered off into the woods. They *denied* that they were lost; they felt that they had found a better path through the wilderness. Why shouldn’t everyone follow them instead?

Paul knew that nothing but heartache awaited them. Sooner or later they would find themselves alone in that spiritual wasteland. Sooner or later they would feel the panic of not knowing how to move forward. Sooner or later they would make even worse decisions and be overwhelmed by forces much more powerful than themselves.

Consequences of being lost

Journey to nowhere?

A purposeful journey is a journey with a starting point and a clearly defined destination. When we get lost, that connection is broken. We have lost the connection with our starting point. And that means that we cannot find our way forward.

Some of the believers in Corinth had done just that: they had lost the connection between Jesus’ resurrection on Easter morning and their own resurrection when Jesus returned. Instead, they had come up with their own path – one that followed a more familiar pagan path and avoided a future resurrection entirely.

Paul calls them out – like a hike leader calling to members of his group who have wandered off and are trying to make their own trail to the summit. He says:

[Slide 2]

1 Corinthians 15:29 NIV

Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?

How we would love to know just what Paul was talking about here! Most likely he was describing a church practice whereby people were vicariously baptized for loved ones who had accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord, but had died before being baptized.

Whatever the case, Paul is pointing out that the “shortcut” of avoiding our future resurrection by simply saying our spirit goes to heaven cuts the link between our journey’s start point and final destination. Baptism symbolizes being *resurrected* when Jesus returns. It stands for the destination of the journey: body and spirit re-united in a new “resurrection body.”

This other path doesn’t “go there.” If there is no resurrection of believers, then there is no point in celebrating this great hope through baptism. This path creates a journey to nowhere.

A useless journey:

A journey to nowhere is a useless exercise. Paul goes on to say:

[Slide 3]

1 Corinthians 15:30-32 NIV

And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I face death every day – yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[Slide 4] *If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained?*

If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

The Exodus journey to God's New Creation – and our own resurrection – is a strenuous one, to say the least. For Paul it meant literally facing death in a thousand ways and a thousand places. This new journey became his life work. But what was the point of taking such risks and expending the days and years of his life in this way, if the final resurrection wasn't going to happen?

It would be an utterly useless journey, like spending hours and hours circling around the lower slopes of Mt. Mansfield and never getting to the top. Lots of effort, to be sure, but no pay off. Why not just pack it in and go home?

A deceptive journey:

The final consequence of this journey to nowhere is that it ends in sin and deception. Remember the stages of getting lost? The stage that comes after making a wrong plan is **Deterioration**. Everything breaks down.

And that is what happens to our faith journey, Paul says:

[Slide 5]

1 Corinthians 15:33-34 NIV

Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God – I say this to your shame.

When we disconnect from God's Story and its triumphant ending, we stop following God's Spirit to God's destination. Instead, we start listening to each other and following each other's seemingly brilliant ideas. Things that were never meant to be part of the journey now become "normalized." And we lose our focus on God Himself. As Paul says, we become "ignorant of God."

As Proverbs says:

[Slide 6]

Proverbs 16:25 NIV

There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.

Back on Track!

“Resolve”

[Slide 7]

If anyone had the right to give up in a failed journey it would have been Steve Callahan. At the ripe old age of 29 he was sailing across the Atlantic in a small sailboat when – in the middle of the night – a whale smashed into the boat, creating a hole in the hull. As water filled the cabin, Callahan knew he had just a few minutes to abandon ship.

Little did he know, but he would spend the next 76 days in a 6’ life raft. He watched ships pass, but they failed to see his signals for help. The raft ripped open, forcing him to make emergency repairs just to stay afloat. But he refused to lie down and die. Finally, fishermen off Guadeloupe saw birds hovering over his raft and came to investigate. He was saved.

[Slide 8]

Callahan had reached that final stage of being lost. He could have given in to **Resignation**, but instead he chose the path of **Resolve**. He kept his focus on moving forward, on somehow being found and rescued. He was able to say:

I still don't regret my 76 days alone in the raft. To this day I feel enlightened by what I went through because it changed me for the better.”

(theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2012/mar/23/adrift...)

Back on Track!

Moms: you know how important it is to get back on track when the journey gets confusing! Not only are you doing *your* life journey, but you are, for a significant time in your life, committed to helping launch a new generation on its life journey.

Like Paul, you know what it is like to see your child get lost on his or her journey. It might be comforting a 2 year old who is overtired. It might be trying to convince two siblings of the joy of sharing their toys instead of fighting over them! It might be struggling to get through to a teen who doesn't want to hear what you have to say.

What your child needs most at such times is what Paul's church in Corinth needed: someone who saw the big picture of the journey, from start to

finish. Someone who won't be fooled by the promise of shortcuts that go nowhere. Someone who knows what it feels like to get lost and knows what a joy it is to be found by the Good Shepherd.

Paul understood that the only way to truly understand our human journey was to see that its ultimate destination is a new life in a new resurrected body in God's New Creation. That's why he pushed back so hard against the dead-end shortcuts offered by the "bad company" that had infiltrated the Corinthian church.

Our kids need that same hope. They need to see that God's plan for them is vastly bigger than the next 3 posts on social media, or what their peer group thinks of them at the moment. They need to see that God's plan for them is bigger than Time itself.

And that's where moms and dads, both biological and spiritual, come in. When the whole world seems engulfed in denial, panic, ill-thought alternative plans and deterioration – the whole gamut of being lost – God calls us to be the Steve Callahans who hang in there, who refuse to quit, who dare to believe that there *is* a destination to this journey which only God knows and only God can make happen.

Our job: stay on track!

LIFE Group Lesson for "The Journey"

Ice Breaker

- Have you ever gotten lost – so lost you had no idea where you were or how to go forward? What did it feel like? What did you do to get "unlost"?

The Christian life is a journey:

- It begins when we decide to follow Jesus the King out of the realm of sin and death on a life-long journey to His new Kingdom.
 - It's our New Exodus journey.
- The original Exodus journey was made possible by the miracle of God parting the Red Sea so that the Israelites could escape certain death at the hands of Pharaoh.
 - They went through that body of water on dry land – finding a path of life in a place that otherwise would have meant certain death.
- Our Exodus journey is made possible by the miracle of God raising Jesus from the dead, thus making a path through Death itself into eternal life.

Keeping the final goal in sight:

- Paul talks about this journey in his letter to the church in Philippi. He says:
 - *Philippians 3:10-11 NIV*
 - *I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*
- Ask Paul what he thinks is the final destination of the New Exodus journey and he will only have one answer: *the resurrection from the dead.*
 - It's worth giving up his past (see verses 7-8)
 - It's worth "participating in Christ's sufferings."
 - It's worth "becoming like him in his death."
- He goes on to say that in one sense, the verdict is still out on his journey:
 - *Philippians 3:12-14 NIV*
 - *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.*
 - *Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*
- He's in the middle of the journey when he writes these words.
 - Resurrection is there for him at the finish line.
 - He presses on toward the goal to win that prize.
 - He refuses to "get lost" along the way!

Lost travelers:

- What a contrast between Paul and the people he wrote to in Corinth!
 - They had lost sight of the resurrection from the dead.
 - They saw a bodily resurrection as at the very least, unnecessary. Weren't they already "in the Spirit"?
- With that kind of mentality, they cut the link between the starting point and the final destination.
 - That's why Paul reminds them that their stance makes baptism futile – it no longer stands for anything.

- Suffering for Jesus in this life, or “becoming like him in his death” (Phil 3:10) is likewise an utter waste of time.
- Why not just live for the day and have a good time while it lasts?
- Worst of all, Paul tells them that they are “ignorant of God.”
 - God called them to this amazing journey.
 - God raised Jesus from the dead.
 - God promised to raise them as well, because of their faith in Jesus.
 - But they don’t really know who He is!
- They need to “come back to their senses and stop sinning.” (1 Cor. 15:34)
 - Literally, they need to stop being “drunk.”
 - And they need to stop “missing the mark.”

Finding *our* way in the journey:

- What’s *your* future, *your destination*, in your faith journey?
- What’s *your motivation* right here in the middle of the journey? What keeps you going?
- Who is your God?
- Answer those questions correctly and you’ll never get lost!