

All Saints Sunday
November 7, 2010

Destination Life
Luke 6:20-31

At the end of last week, the Krombholz family took a short overnight trip to Pennsylvania. Since we were leaving on Friday afternoon, we decided to avoid the turnpike traffic and explore the back roads a little bit. We set the GPS for our destination and off we went. We saw new places and even rediscovered old places we had forgotten. We meandered down country roads by scenery arrayed in its glorious autumnal best. We drove past fields of cows and goats and lakes and ponds filled with ducks, geese and swans; we marked old church buildings and schools and tried to remember quaint little towns we could revisit later; pumpkin patches and orchards and little markets tempted us to stop and spend some time and money. Two and half hours into what should have been a 60-minute trip our destination still seemed far away. But we were together – singing, laughing, complaining, learning, living together.

We made terrible time. But you couldn't help but wonder if the real goal didn't have a place as a destination. I mean, was it all that important to get to the hotel or was it the being together, living together that was the real end. As a family and as Christians, the destination is not so much arriving at a place as living a life.

Of the many metaphors we use to describe the Christian life, perhaps the two most fitting and helpful would be disciple – or apprentice – and then, pilgrim – a person who leaves the comforts of house and home behind and pursues a promise to a new place. When Jesus calls his first disciples, he calls them to unsettled lives as pilgrim-apprentices. Like Abraham before them, like Jesus himself, these men and women leave everything to follow God's lead, trusting in God's promise of a future destination, as well as God's presence all along the way.

While in transit, Jesus teaches his disciples how to live together as God's people, to live together in -- and more importantly -- *for* the world. It's not just the peripatetic style of Jesus that makes the life of the disciple a pilgrimage. The apprenticeship process itself is a transition from one way of life to another, and so, we talk of discipleship to Jesus as being a journey, not a destination. We walk with Jesus. We learn from Jesus.

We're a community of pilgrim, apprentices on the move – collecting food and redistributing it to people who need it – doing the same with coats, shirts, furniture ... even our money. While we live and breath as God's baptized people in this creation our lives are about the journey we make with Jesus – always learning, always growing, always serving ... always reforming – as we noted last week.

At the same time, we live in this world as a people who expect and sometimes even demand instant results. The thing I hate about traffic is that I have to wait even longer to get to where I want to go. Maybe that's why I always loved Star Trek idea of being beamed somewhere. Sure, I'll risk molecular annihilation for the reward of almost instantly arriving at my destination. (By the way, physicists say, that while something like me would arrive at our intended destination, it really wouldn't be me.) I think there's something to that. We may get there fast, but we risk losing ourselves along the way.

For all our talk, we are not a people so much interested in the journey or in the relationships of a life lived in transit. We look for the quickest and easiest way to the end. Just give us the print out of the bullet points – the 45 minute liturgy, the 3-minute homily and beam us up. There's a scene in the matrix where they teach Neo martial arts, by downloading the knowledge he needs directly into his brain. In an instant, he knows what apprentices may a train a lifetime to learn.

The gift of life and salvation God gives to us and does for us at this font is as sure and as certain as God and God's Word that raised Jesus from the dead, but it is a life, not a place, not a destination. Our baptism does not instantly translate us to heaven, but raises us to new life, joined to Jesus. Dead to sin and alive to Christ, we are set free to boldly follow God into God's future. The life we are given as we emerge from this font is real life, lasting life, enduring life, life into the ages, eternal life. The great, surprising secret of the kingdom of heaven is that it is not a place. As Jesus' disciples, we discover the kingdom of heaven, the life in abundance that lives into the ages in a relationship with a God who is living and moving has a future. To be alive is to have a future. When God raised Jesus from the dead – we were given a future, a life, eternal as God's love for us.

That is why we can say with confidence this morning that those whom we remember here, those pioneers in the way of discipleship and pilgrimage who have died in Christ in the waters of baptism are even now alive in Christ in the kingdom of God. That is why we talk about this meal being a foretaste of the feast to come, the event of Christ's presence where we worship with angels, archangels, the saints who have gone before us, the saints who surround us now, the saints who will come after us. Because the same power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in us. That union, that presence, that kingdom, that life in God is our inheritance with all the saints. God loves you; Jesus died and now lives for you. ***Life together in Christ is the destination*** – not a place, but a love.

Yet, it's funny. God's love is always particular, always material – always an event in a certain place at a particular time with particular people. God's love creates a place, a destination. It is where Jesus is – where the poor become rich; the hungry fed; the weeping ones start laughing for joy at the new thing God is doing. The place in God where we are truly happy, truly blessed. Don't you want to go there ... right now? In Jesus' name. Amen.