

SERMON AT TRINITY UMC, WILMETTE, ILLINOIS

“FOUR ROADS THAT WE CAN TRAVEL”

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TEXT: Matthew 7:10-13

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On Memorial Day my wife and I did something we had never attempted before: we went to Milwaukee for lunch. You may be thinking: “There’s nothing unusual about a trip to Milwaukee.” But in fact, we traveled separately. I drove; she pedaled. I was in a car on Interstate 94; she was on a bicycle, exploring the back roads. It was a spectacular day. I went to the museum where the Dead Sea Scrolls were on display. She delighted in 160 miles round trip of fresh air.

If you want to go to Milwaukee, how many ways are there to travel? You can go by car, by bike, or Amtrak train. If you have a friend with a boat, you can go by water. You can take the bus, or you can even walk. Some ways are faster, but they are all good ways to reach Milwaukee. But what if our destination is not Milwaukee? What if our destination is the house of the Lord, as in, “I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever”? How many ways are there to travel home to God?

The Bible suggests that there are a number of pathways that can bring us into the presence of God. Here are four of the roads that I have discovered in the New Testament.

First, we can travel home to God on the **Damascus Road**, like Saul of Tarsus. Saul was on a rampage against the church. He wanted nothing to do with Jesus, but to his surprise – to everyone’s surprise – he was blinded on the Damascus Road by a light from heaven. He experienced a dramatic conversion, from hostility to passionate faith. The Damascus Road is for people who have been turned off by Jesus, and then they are surprised by God’s love.

A second way to find God is to take the **Jericho Road**. The Jericho Road in the New Testament is where muggings took place, where people were attacked and beaten and left for dead. Most people avoided the victims, but Jesus tells a story about a man from Samaria, a courageous and compassionate traveler. We don’t know his name. We simply call him the Good Samaritan. He stopped to help a fellow human being in distress. The Jericho Road is for people who love people, people who care enough – because of their faith – to do something for those beaten down by life. It’s the road of service.

A third way to travel home to God is to take the **Emmaus Road**. The Emmaus Road is for people whose dreams have not come true. Wishing for Christmas, they have found only winter. Wishing for Easter, they have found only Good Friday. They are like the two disciples of Jesus who traveled to Emmaus with sagging shoulders and heavy hearts. When a stranger approached, they did not notice that it was Jesus alive. They continued to drag their feet until there was a quiet miracle in their life at suppertime. They woke up to the beauty of Christ, who had been with them unnoticed. The Emmaus Road is for people who feel dull and droopy, until the eyes of their heart are opened.

Fourth and finally, we can travel home to God on the **Calvary Road**, the road of suffering love. This road is for parents who ache for a struggling child. It is for lovers who continue to love when their hearts are broken. It is for followers of Gandhi and King who stand up for justice, putting their lives on the line. The Calvary Road is the way of the cross, and it is true, as we used to sing, that “The way of the cross leads home.”

What I’m saying is this: there are many roads in the New Testament that lead to the same destination: new life, abundant life, eternal life with God. But “how?”, we ask. How can we find our personal road that leads to a new way of life with God?

The answer, I believe, is an exciting combination of God’s grace and human effort. That’s what Jesus is saying in our text from Matthew, chapter 6. “Enter through the narrow gate,” he says, “for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction . . . [but] the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life.” In other words, on none of the roads can we coast, if we want to be fully alive with God.

A man was traveling from O’Hare to Los Angeles several years ago. The flight attendant came by and said, “Sir, would you like to have dinner?” He said, “Thank you. What are my choices?” She said: “Yes or no.” To be a disciple, Jesus is telling us, we always have two choices: yes and no. God’s grace gives us the possibility of safe travel. God’s grace gives us the companionship of Christ, who will never leave us. But in the end, we must decide. Will we say yes, not a yes that is merely verbal, but a yes that gets us up and moving?

There is a road that is right for each of us. The Damascus Road is for those who are fighting against God. The Jericho Road is for those who care in practical ways when neighbors are in trouble. The Emmaus Road is for those who are depleted and discouraged. The Calvary Road is for those who keep on loving until their hearts are broken. None of the roads are easy. But if we are willing to say yes, we can find our way.

To paraphrase the Chicago Blackhawks slogan: we have one goal. But for us, it’s not a trophy. Our one goal is to be fully alive in God. By God’s grace and with determined effort, we can make the journey.