Sermon copyright © 2016 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

Pentecost 18C
Camp Long
September 4, 2016
Deuteronomy 30:15-20, Luke 14:25-33

ROAD TRIP

Our family took a road trip this summer to southern California and back; a 2700-mile odyssey that left us with a whole vanload of memories.

Along the way, we played an assortment of car games including one called CHAT PACK. CHAT PACK is deck of cards and on each card is a different question to ponder, like...

- In your opinion what would be the most enjoyable thing about being a dog or a cat? OR...
- If you were asked to design a brand new building, what would it look like?

Each person takes a turn answering the question.

And when we'd had enough of CHAT PACK, we'd play "WOULD YOU RATHER."

WOULD YOU RATHER is a forced choice game in which the questioner offers two often wildly opposing alternatives that you must choose from. Often enough, the choices are designed to get you squirming or to gross you out. **Example:**

- Would you rather jump with a bungee cord off the West Seattle Bridge, OR ride on top of a moving car on the freeway?
- Would you rather ride a zip line between the Columbia Tower and the Space Needle OR be on a sinking ferry in Puget Sound?
- Would you rather have cottage cheese in your bed for a week OR have peanut butter and jelly smooshed inside your shoes for a week?

The idea is NOT to give you a good choice and a bad choice—that would be much too easy! The idea is to give you two DESPICABLE options—then force you to work out which one to choose.

In our lesson from Deuteronomy today, Moses and the children of Israel are nearing the end of their long road trip. Our family trip lasted 3 weeks; theirs lasted 40 years.

And along the way there was plenty of drama, plenty of squabbling, plenty of heartache, and a collection of memories significant enough to be passed down from generation to generation until, finally, they were written down so that the lessons they taught would never be forgotten.

As they near the end of their long road trip, Moses summarizes what their wilderness trek has been about. He reminds them of the covenant God's made with them; he goes over the rules of the road they've been given to live by; and then, in today's verses, he lays out the choices before them.

- Would you rather... have God as your friend, live your lives according to God's plan, receive God's blessing, and enter the Promised Land with confidence? **OR...**
- Would you rather... have God as your enemy, trade the God who freed you from bondage for some other god, and live a cursed life?
- **WOULD YOU RATHER EMBRACE LIFE or DEATH? BLESSINGS or CURSES?**

The choices are stark; the stakes are high; the answer seems to be a NO BRAINER!

AND YET, we know from the history that follows, that the Hebrew children didn't always choose life. And, in spite of the benefit of hindsight, neither do we.

Sermon copyright © 2016 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

By the time we reach the 14th chapter of Luke's gospel, Jesus has been on a road trip for several chapters, and lots of people have begun joining him.

There's a scene in the film Forrest Gump where Forrest, after he's left behind by the love of his life, decides to go for a run; and he keeps on running...and running...and running—for 3½ years, all the way from one coast to the other.

At first, he's a solitary runner. But over time, others join him, and when his story's picked up by the media, people project on Forrest all kinds of motives for why he's doing what he's doing.
And he becomes a celebrity and the crowds running beside him get huge.

The crowds surrounding Jesus at this point in the gospel are kind of like that.

They're attracted to him, to what he says and what he represents, but they don't get the full picture of who he is and where this road trip is heading.

Jesus, knowing this, stops the parade, turns around, and tells them they need to COUNT THE COST.

HE WANTS THEM TO KNOW WHAT FOLLOWING HIM—WHAT DISCIPLESHIP—REALLY MEANS.
And he tells them with words that bite our ears...

> WHOEVER COMES TO ME AND DOES NOT HATE FATHER AND MOTHER, WIFE AND CHILDREN; BROTHERS AND SISTERS—YES, AND EVEN LIFE ITSELF—CANNOT BE MY DISCIPLE. WHOEVER DOES NOT CARRY THE CROSS AND FOLLOW ME CANNOT BE MY DISCIPLE.

OUCH! Did Jesus really mean it? Was he having a particularly bad day? What's going on here?

I find what Bible scholar Fred Craddock has to say to be helpful here. He says:

> [The word translated "hate" here] (*miseo*) is a Semitic expression meaning to turn away from, to detach oneself from. There is nothing [in this text] of that emotion we experience in the expression "I hate you." Were that the case, then [this] verse alone would cancel [out] all the calls to love, to care, to nourish, especially one's own family found throughout both testaments.
>
> And to hate one's own life is not a call for self-loathing, to regard oneself as a worm, to toss oneself on the trash heap of the world. We have not been given any right to judge ourselves. …What is demanded of disciples, however, is that in the network of many loyalties in which all of us live, the claim of Christ and the gospel not only takes precedence but, in fact, redefines the others. This...will necessarily involve some detaching, some turning away.[1]

In other words, Jesus' saying, *"Give up all your possessions"* could be read *"Give up all that possesses you."*

To become attached to Jesus we must detach ourselves from the things that possess us.

- Unless you detach yourself from your devices, you cannot be my disciple.
- Unless you detach yourself your stock market quest for security, you cannot be my disciple.
- Unless you detach yourself from your addiction to (blank) you cannot be my disciple.

Are you ready for that inventory?

Jesus lays it on the line today. But it's the kind of tough love we (let me say I) need in order to cut through the layers of insulation I surround myself with, and to reach into my core.

[1] Fred Craddock. *Luke. Interpretation Commentary*. (Louisville: John Knox Press). Emphasis mine.

Sermon copyright © 2016 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

In his book Falling Upward Richard Rohrer talks about the two journeys we must make—one in the first half of life, the other in the second half.

To begin life's second-half journey, says Rohrer, we must, like Abraham and Sarah, like Moses and his people, get out on a road trip, leaving what is familiar behind and getting out of our comfort zone.

"When Jesus calls his first disciples," Rohrer points out, "he's talking... to people who are already happily settled and religiously settled! [and] He's not talking [to them] about joining a new security system or a religious denomination or...a religious order that pays all your bills…[2]

Responding to Jesus' call to FOLLOW means moving out from the confines of the very home we spent the first half of life settling into!

"To build your house well," concludes Rohrer, "is, ironically, to be nudged beyond its doors."[3]

Truth be told, all the things I do to brace myself against life's risks, to create butter zones against life's more difficult experiences, all these finally fail. And the answer to the question, Can I protect myself? Is, finally, NOT REALLY.

But the irony of the gospel is that in letting go, in ceding my illusory control of life to the Power greater than myself—in "losing my self-constructed SELF"—I am found. This is what Richard Rohrer means by the title of his book, FALLING UPWARD.

When our eyes and our trust are fixed on the crucified and risen One, then, no matter what life throws at us, we find ourselves in his embrace.

Then, no matter what we face on this road trip we call life, we can know we will never be deserted, we can know Jesus is with us come hell or high water.

That embrace, that assurance, is not an achievement. It's a gift.

And when we gather around this Table, we are reminded of that gift. And when we remember our baptism, we are reminded of that gift. Reminded, in the words of the psalm, that like a tree planted by the waters, our leaves will not wither or fade away; and we shall not be moved.

Amen.

[2] Richard Rohrer. Falling Upward
[3] Ibid. p. 23