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Pentecost Sunday C Confirmation
Peace, Seattle
May 19, 2010 epk
Acts 2:1-21, Romans 8:12-17

CACHING IN ON GOD

The first sign we came across on our GEO-CACHING[1] adventure, as we turned onto what we thought was a public road on Vashon Island, sent us a clear message. It read:

NOTHING I HAVE IS WORTH YOUR LIFE.

But it was the second sign that found me hitting the breaks and making a U-turn as quickly as possible:

NO TRESPASSING—this one said—WE DON'T CALL 911.

And the illustration complemented it nicely: the barrel of a Smith & Wesson six-shooter—pointed right at us. Remember that, boys?

Now friends, if you haven't got the slightest clue what "geocaching" is about, don't worry, 'cause I hadn't either until Nicole said it would be the perfect group activity for our day long, roving retreat.

Simply put, geocaching is an outdoor treasure hunting game. Players try to locate hidden containers, called geocaches, using GPS-enabled devices and then share their experiences online.

So there we all were: Ike, K2, Kyle, Noah, Stuart, Nicole, and me—staring at the screen on Nicole's iPhone, with one blinking dot telling us YOU ARE HERE, and another one pinpointing the location of the secret cache we were seeking.

We'd already scored our first geocache that day—and it had been easy, for the landmark we'd been given—the life-sized wooden statue of COOL GARY—was literally right across the road from our HOME BASE for the retreat: Vashon Lutheran Church.

But our second geocache goal was proving much more difficult. In spite of the fact that we were guided by a GPS with a built in map; in spite of the fact that we had clues to tell us which way to turn and how far to go, we kept running into dead ends and were having a heck of a time reaching the goal.

And those two signs: NOTHING I HAVE IS WORTH YOUR LIFE…
And: NO TRESPASSING WE DON'T CALL 911, weren't helping!

In fact, when combined with the echo of gunfire we heard not far away, and the fact that the road we were on was — get this! — Cemetery Road, those signs upped the anti on our little adventure, and finally forced us to stop seeking the second of five geocache goals, for we were not about to die trying!

Later, in the forest, above the beach, and in a rusted out boat hull, we found better success.
And the gift was, the experience gave us some new language and new touchstones and new questions, too, for exploring what it could mean to be on this journey of faith together.

[1] The term "geocaching," was first coined on May 30, 2000. It is the joining of two familiar words: the prefix GEO, for Earth, and CACHING, from the word CACHE. "Cache" has two different meanings: (1) The French word invented in 1797 refers to a hiding place one would use to temporarily store items (think voyageurs and pirates). (2) The contemporary, technological term refers to computer storage capacity used to quickly retrieve frequently used information. To learn more, go to: www.geocaching.com.

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What is the core of faith about? Is all we have to do plug in our coordinates and follow the blinking light to our destination? Or is the journey itself what counts?

At our final confirmation retreat last month at Camp Lutherwood, we ended our two-year sojourn together searching once more for geocache treasure. And, like our first retreat, sometimes we found what we were seeking while other times the goal eluded us.

This journey we've been on—we are on—from baptism onward is not always a straight line or clearly marked path.

- Sometimes obstacles get in the way…obstacles both out there or in here.
- Sometimes the clues we receive are hard to decipher and even harder to understand.
- Sometimes unexpected twists and turns lead us down unbidden paths to losses or pains that cause us to question everything.
- And sometimes we come up against a world that seems bent on challenging our every move, or tearing us down—through hostility, threats, isolation, or fear.

At times like these it's easy to forget who loves us, where we came from, and to whom we belong.

And that's why you—why we—need to keep coming back here… back to this community, back to the Word, back to the waters, back to the place where the risen One meets us in tangible, edible promises: THIS IS MY BODY…THIS IS MY BLOOD…FOR YOU; back to the place where the Spirit is blowing, moving, leading, guiding. Back to Jesus.

For Christ Jesus is our compass, you see. He is the One who grounds our feet and orients our lives. When the satellites go down and every other means for finding our way forward fails, he remains steadfast, reminding us: YOU ARE MY BELOVED, AND WHO YOU ARE IS WORTH MY LIFE…WHO YOU ARE IS WORTH DYING FOR.

What does all this mean? It's a very Lutheran question and one that Christians have been asking from the very beginning. A question we never cease to ask on this journey of faith.

One thing it means is this: Confirmation is more like trail marker than an endpoint.
It's closer to the beginning of something than the end of it.

Yes, God made the true beginning when God coaxed you from your mother's womb and when, by your parents, you were brought to the WATERS to be washed, marked with the cross and sealed with the Holy Spirit…that's when the seed sprouted and began sending down roots and sending out shoots and branches…but do you see—God has so much more in store for you! So much more!

"Beloved," John writes, "we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed."[2]

Affirming your faith today doesn't mean that all the questions are answered and all the issues are settled. Some of the best questions are still ahead of you, waiting to be discovered, probed, lived.

Yet, you're on your way. You have a compass.

[2] 1 John 3.2

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Today, our reading from ACTS takes us to the heart of Jerusalem as a powerful wind let's loose, stirring up the disciple community, driving them out into the public square, and enabling a multilingual crowd to hear good news in language they can understand; fulfilling God's ancient and ever new promise to pour out the Spirit on all flesh.

On and on the Spirit goes throughout this book, gaining momentum through ever widening circles, crossing boundaries once considered unassailable, and carrying us along in her wake.

No stone is left unturned (or unrolled!), no stump unsearched, no place is too remote. The gospel's trajectory is unstoppable!

All these stories testify to the existence of true treasure and, like geocaching, give us routes to follow. But there's one big difference. When you're geocaching, the treasure, the goal, is beyond you and it's up to you to read the clues and follow the signal until you find it.

But when it comes to this journey of faith, the treasure it turns out, is seeking us!

The One Triune God—triangulating our location by way of a divine global positioning system—locks on to each and every one of us and tirelessly seeks us out, emptying heaven to reach us.

From all indications, God isn't finished yet. And God won't stop playing until every last one of us blinking dots is linked back to the Source of love and finds our self home.

Amen.