

Sermon for 5-22-2011
1 Peter 3:8-22

I was heading back to Charlotte North Carolina from Washington DC. To get on the highway going south, I first had to begin going around the Beltway a loop of interstate that goes in a circle around Washington DC, then I would exit and head south. I was thinking deeply, after a while I realized that I was at the northern end of the Beltway. At this point all I could do was keep going, passing the exit I got on. I had gone a full sixty mile circle around Washington DC.

Today as a congregation we are asking where are we going God. There are two aspects to this question. Asking about the overall destination and asking about our position on the way. As we go on our way we can get caught up in conflict in the church... focused on others actions (evil)...distracted by fears (suffering) ... All of these things can lead us to lose track of where we are going or where we are on the way. So we gather to listen again for God's guidance. We discern together where God wants us to go and where we are now.

As we try to move forward each doing our own thing, with our own agenda we can end up going nowhere. (Describe traffic jam picture with cars coming from all four ways filling the street.) 1 Peter offers guidance for the way of living of those who have new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Verse eight begins with a refreshed description of deep mutual love in community. Have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Instead of being caught up in the traffic jam of disagreements, and personal agendas, we move together guided by the spirit of God. We listen to one another, trying to understand with tenderness and humility. We demonstrate love for one another. We don't just get along together, but we build up one another. As Christ did we make sacrifices for each other, so that God will be glorified.

One day an older lady thought she was following her sister to lunch when her sister was actually behind her. The older lady followed this unknown car until it turned into a driveway out in the sticks while her sister waited for her at home.

When someone goes off track and even takes us with them our response is not to condemn them but to turn from evil and do good. Our response as God's people is to even look for how to bless the one who has gone the wrong way. We respond in a new way among those who do not believe or when other believers go off track. That means paying attention to God more than paying attention to the one doing wrong. If we pay more attention to the one doing wrong we will move off the path with them. When the center of our life is rightly related to God focused on Jesus Christ we can respond in a 'righteous' way. We bless others, who don't believe. We seek peace and pursue it. We find through prayer consistently offered to our Lord the path that does good and blesses others.

Sometimes we are going down the road and we see the backup ahead. There is construction slowing down traffic, there can be the temptation to drive up the edge of the road to try to get around the trouble. (or get off at the closest exit, even if it takes us off course.)

1 Peter reminds us even if there is trouble, even if there is suffering, we are called to live for God no matter what. Our attention is not focused on the troubles we face, so that where we go is driven by our suffering. We don't need to be afraid or intimidated by suffering. We endure difficult and painful waiting with the way ahead not clear. We keep our conscience clear so we can relate well with others. We give our reverence/attention to Christ as Lord in our lives. Then we are ready no matter what is happening in our journey of faith to answer anyone who asks us why we believe.

As we follow Jesus people will ask us about the hope we have. Christians are distinguished by hope. Our reply is to honor God. Our reply is to live rightly. Our reply is to let God use our life and words in his act of transformation in another's life.

As we ask God where are we going, we hear in first Peter, as you follow Jesus build up one another, bless 'others', and even when you suffer live for God.

Noah is an example of how these generalities take on specific actions. As Noah went on his way pleasing God, God directed him to build an ark. Noah took the risk to listen and act. He was not caught up in family conflict, or focused on others evil actions or distracted by his fears of being made to look like a fool. Focused on God he made an ark. Then he got in the ark. He had hope the water would recede.

This reminds us of our appeal to God in baptism saying we will follow, trusting God to bring salvation. We vow that we will do good as we wait for Jesus to be revealed to all as Lord. We live out this journey in partnership with the community of those who believe yet in relationship with those who do not believe. Where are we going God?

In Luke we know that Jesus comes to his disciples with peace in the uncertainty of knowing what to do with his resurrection. He acts to strengthen their faith and to define the mission for them as those who believe in the resurrection. They are sent to all the nations as witnesses proclaiming repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name.

In Communion we affirm that Jesus still comes to us. In Communion Jesus joins us together, to go with him into our world together that the name of Jesus may be known. As we do this we will find our way forward taking risks to build up our community of faith. We will move forward taking risks to bless all those around us no matter what obstacles or suffering we may face.