

Easter 5 – May 7, 2023
Text: John 14:1-14
Theme: Road Trip to Heaven

In 1967 my family took a road trip from Seattle, Washington to Charlotte, North Carolina. We went for the whole summer so my dad could not come with us. Mom loaded four kids into a Volkswagen Squareback and set off across the country. My oldest brother rode in the front seat beside Mom, my sister and other brother in the back seat and I had the beautiful, spacious luggage area all to myself, besides a few suitcases. I was in heaven! I had my toy soldiers, my matchbox cars and plenty of snacks! Later in life I heard the stories about that trip from the older three and it is remarkable that I was so completely unaware of any of the stress and trial of that trip! My oldest brother's leg was in a cast from a skiing accident, so he was irritable and in pain the whole way. We got lost in St. Louis and circled the city about three times. My sister remained horrendously car sick for most of the trip. Since there were no cell phones or internet in those days, there was the stress of finding motel rooms every night of the 5- or 6-night trip, and all the while I remained blissfully unaware playing with my cars and soldiers and munching on Cracker Jack.

It occurs to me that the kind of faith I had in my mother and my siblings to get us to North Carolina is very similar to the child-like

faith Jesus wants us to have in Him. In our Gospel for today, Jesus is preparing them for His departure from this earth. I don't remember being at all concerned during our 1967 road trip, but if I had voiced concern over finding a motel, or getting out of St. Louis, I can imagine my mother telling me not to worry about it, that she would take care of everything and I imagine that I would have gladly accepted those words and gotten back to the toy soldier war that was at hand. Jesus says to His disciples and to us as well,

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going."

Of course, the disciples are adults not children. As adults, faith is harder. In 2000 I took my family on a road trip from Seattle to Arizona. The internet had become common but smartphones did not exist yet and laptops were for rich people so hotel rooms were still a challenge and there was the good old Rand McNally Road Atlas instead of Google Maps. The kids had to ride in car seats and loudly proclaimed their dissatisfaction after about the first 1/2 hour. Grandma's hip was hurting, Danya's back was hurting and Noah

managed to contract strep throat. To cap it off, Neal got lost at the resort because he decided to move from the lazy river to the wave pool without consulting a parent. The family road trip, when you are the one in charge, was not as wonderful as I had remembered from my childhood in the luggage bay. As an adult, I was trying to control every moment of every day, and I hadn't learned yet to relax and trust God to take care of us in every way. That's what God promises. "Trust in me," he says.

God promises to take care of us. Jesus is very clear. We know the Way. We know the Way because He is the Way. He has prepared a place for us in paradise and He is with us every step of the way until we reach our goal – His goal really because He has set the goal for us and attained it for us and now walks beside us until that goal is finally in our hands. That is where He wants us to focus. When we worry and fret over the multitudinous variables that can affect our lives, not only are we wasting our time but our focus is in the wrong place. God has set us on the path to where true joys are to be found. He has done everything for us!

Jesus tells us to relax. He has taken care of everything and while we might be metaphorically free-wheeling around St. Louis or feeling a little carsick from time to time, we don't have to ever worry because Jesus is the Way, the truth and the life. So we never have to

worry that something might not come our right. Will it come out the way we want it? Maybe not, but that's okay because I can guarantee you that it will come out the way Jesus wants it.

Philip was not being trite. He really did not understand what Jesus was saying. Jesus was talking about going somewhere to prepare a place for them and they are supposed know the way but it all seemed a little mystical to Philip. He, like us often, wanted some concrete facts. Where are you going Lord and how do we get there? But you'll never get to heaven that way. If you try to get there on your own, you'll mess it up. You'll be circling St. Louis for eternity with no place to stay and horrendously carsick. Only Jesus can get us there so relax into Jesus' hands and let him drive.

Our whole life is one giant road trip to heaven. Everything that we do – everything that happens to us along the way – every success or failure we experience is part of our journey to paradise and Jesus is driving this bus. Let Jesus drive! He will very likely take you in directions you would not have gone and he may bypass some places you think look like a lot of fun, but let Jesus drive. Constantly, intentionally pull your hands back from the wheel and let Jesus show you the way because he has promised to get you to heaven. He has promised to be with you every step of the way, and He will fulfill this promise just as He has fulfilled every other promise.