

“GPS- God’s Positioning System” - Rev. Jeff Childs

Getting to and through Jerusalem. How have you ever gotten to where you are going? Did you ever follow a map or atlas? On our family vacations my father drove, and my mother always read the maps and gave him the turn by turn directions. From her I developed a love for maps and navigation. Back before my senior year in college, I wanted to drive down and visit my roommate from Penn State, but he lived in the Philadelphia region at the opposite end of PA. So, I got out my state map and recorded onto a cassette recorder each turn and direction from one end of the state to the other. Then while I drove the car, I simply played the next portion of the tape until I reached my destination. I virtually did what my GPS does for me now. Do you use a GPS? If you don’t remember, GPS stands for the Global Positioning System which was developed back in the 1970’s for the US military and then adapted for civilian use.

It is a bit different in our journey of faith. The route is not always direct or well-marked. We may find some detours or places where we must change direction in order to ultimately move forward. You may have not noticed it yet, but since I arrived here last month, we have been making some little changes and adjustments to help turn some things around that we might grow to once again become what God wants us to be as a thriving and vital congregation of Christ followers. Going forward we will welcome back more of our members who have been gone for the summer or even longer. We will raise the financial support needed to grow this church and the funding to pay down the mortgage on the new addition. But more than that we will see our ministry and programs grow. In the Gospel story we hear Jesus revealing to the disciples the map or outline of where he was going. Jesus had a destination and a destiny in mind, and they did not want to accept it. Peter even dared to scold Jesus, and try to redirect him, even claiming that God should forbid what Jesus was saying! But Jesus believed it was God’s plan that he should go to Jerusalem and offer himself as the sacrifice for all.

“Get Behind Me, Satan.” Do you have a concept of good and evil perhaps played out symbolically with a little devil speaking one thing in one ear and a little angel speaking another thing in the other ear? There we stand being tugged back and forth in the middle. The eternal battle for many seems likewise to be between God and Satan, but not in this story if you read it again closely. You will find it is us and our human thoughts and ways that stand opposed to God and God’s thoughts and God’s way. And when Peter or you and me would stand in God’s way, it is we who play the role of Satan, the tempter, trying to bend God’s will to conform to our own. Peter stood in front of Jesus perhaps getting in his face to block him from going forward with his plan to go to Jerusalem and the cross. But Jesus would remind him our place as disciples is to be followers of Jesus and not roadblocks. We are to follow Jesus on the Way and not to get in his way. Let’s get behind Jesus! Remember, that when we pray the Lord’s prayer, we pray, “Thy will be done,” not “My will be done.”

Get the Picture? Jesus paints a picture of what it is like when we align ourselves with God and God’s way. Might we see it as recalculating to get back on track with a GPS? Not the Global Positioning System, but God’s Positioning System. How might we lose our self-serving agendas and lose ourselves in the greater purpose and cause for the kingdom of God? Sometimes I see this played out in the church with the best of intentions. Our prayers go up to

ask God to bless what we are already doing or are about to do. But there are churches that have discovered another way. They ask God to help them do what God is blessing. Do you see the difference? We often tell God where we are going and what we want, rather than asking what God wants and what can we do to help bring it about. I have heard the phrase used about some people, hopefully none of us, who may be set in their ways and non-negotiable that their attitude may be “my way or the highway” – take it or leave it. But where I see the real human struggle as epitomized by Peter here in this story - it really theological as, my way or the HIGH-way. Or we might say it is my way or the “God on high”-way. The choice is yours. As a community of faith, may we choose the latter!

There is an ancient legend about Peter, that when the persecution of the Christians began in Rome under Emperor Nero, Peter hastily beat a retreat, and hurried out of town as fast as he could go. As Peter hurried along the Appian Way, away from the city, he was met by Christ, going toward the city. Peter said to him, "Where are you going, Lord?" To which Jesus replied, "Back to Rome, to be crucified with my people. Where are you going, Peter?" Peter's eyes filled with tears of remorse, as he turned and walked back to Rome, where, according to tradition, he was crucified upside down, feeling that he was not worthy to die in the same way as his Lord. Jesus' question to Peter comes to us also. "Where are you going?" Where are we going as a church? Are we going with Christ, or away from Him? That's the really important question. Today he invites you and me to follow and if we ever get off the path or get in God's way, then let's recalculate and come back on the Way of the Cross. Alleluia and Amen.

There Are Those Times

Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs 8/21/23

There are those times when we get lost,
And cannot find our way.
Desperately, at any cost,
We plead to God and pray.

“Thy will be done” is what we say,
When we pray the Lord's prayer,
“My will be done.” I want my way.
Is really what we share.

Despite our faith and our hope,
Our will gets in the way.
When we're at the end of our rope,
Then faith comes into play.

Turning our will over to God,
We ask God to lead us,
And then to God most humbly nod,
And fully follow Jesus.