

If you're at all familiar with Michigan, it's highly possible that you've heard of Mackinac Island, this tiny little island tucked within the Straits of Mackinac, where Lake Michigan and Lake Huron meet each other at the top of the Lower Peninsula. If you've ever seen *Somewhere in Time* with Jane Seymour and Christopher Reeve, you've definitely seen Mackinac because it was filmed there at the Grand Hotel. It's this little oasis plucked out of time where the world seems to standstill. There are no cars allowed on the Island, save for one ambulance and one fire truck, so you get around by bike, horse drawn carriage, or your own two feet. And it is indeed that last mode of transportation that once got my family into a world of trouble.

It was the first time I had ever been to Mackinac. I was maybe 8, and we had gone up for the day while we were on vacation Up North. Well, my dad got it into his head that rather than renting bikes, it would be nice to *walk* the perimeter of the Island. He distinctly said that it couldn't be more than a couple of miles, four at the max. We could do that, four miles no problem. Well...clearly it had been awhile since my dad had been there as well because after we had been walking for a not insignificant amount of time, we reached the "halfway point rest stop" on the other side of the Island and there was the mile marker...four. Four was not the max. Four was indeed *half*. Fun fact, Mackinac Island is eight miles around. *Eight*. Now

of course we were on the complete opposite side of the Island at this point, entirely separate from any other option for transportation since those only exist downtown, at mile *one*. So, we had no other choice, we had already walked four miles, what was another four?!

We've never let my dad live that down. It's become a bit of a recurring joke actually whenever we go up to the Island. How many miles is it around? Couldn't be more than two! Maybe four! As we happily *bike* our way around the Island now, there is no walking, no no, only biking. But the memory remains of that walk we weren't anticipating taking and the journey of it which now lives in family lore, much to my father's annoyance. But there is a certain shred of truth there isn't it? That life is in fact all about the journeys we take, the roads we walk, some of them anticipated, some of them entirely unplanned, some of them short and sweet, some exceedingly longer than we ever could have imagined or hoped for.

It's a characteristic of Luke's writing, of his entire gospel actually, this emphasis on the journey, on the road, on the paths that the people of his gospel walked. If you think about it, it's how Luke's entire gospel starts, it's how Jesus' story starts, Mary and Joseph on the road, walking and riding those long miles between Nazareth and Bethlehem. A donkey ridden, dust filled walk to the holiest night the world has known. Even the parables that

Jesus tells, the ones most beloved by us are in some ways all about travel. The Good Samaritan doesn't happen in some isolated field or in the middle of town, but on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. Compassion found on the roadside between world weary travelers. The Prodigal Son leaves his home and then finds his way back by the well known, well worn roads of his family home. It is that same road which his father races down with open arms to welcome him back. Grace found on the road home. When Jesus finally turns his face towards Jerusalem and his fate, Luke doesn't leave it as just some passing comment, but turns it into a chapters long saga called the "travel narrative" highlighting the hills and valleys that Jesus walked to get to the cross. The salvation of the whole world still had to get there on his own two feet. And then there is the road, the journey of our gospel this morning, two men whose steps are strewn with hopelessness, only to have their journey open before them with words of resurrection.

For these two disciples, it's a road that they never anticipated taking, one rife with grief and loss and dashed hopes. They had followed Jesus into Jerusalem along that Palm Sunday road with palm branches and cloaks shifting beneath their feet, and they thought that all would be well, that their salvation had arrived. They were certain they knew what came next. This was their Messiah and he was going to deliver them from the pain, the

oppression of the Roman Empire. They thought their redemption had arrived. They *had hoped* that now Jesus would lay out before the Jewish people an entirely new road. Except that road only led them to a cross, to death, to the destruction of all of their dreams, the dashing of all of their hopes, and now they have no choice but to take this road they never anticipated walking, the one that leads home with nothing on the horizon but moving on and trying to put the pieces of their lives, their faith back together. Until...well...until that journey takes an unexpected turn and gathers in an unexpected visitor to the trip.

They have no idea that it's Jesus who walks beside them. We don't know why they can't recognize him, if it's some work of the Holy Spirit, not letting them see until the opportune moment or if they are quite literally so blinded by grief that they can't see Jesus right in front of them. And the amazing thing is, Jesus doesn't push the journey, try to change its course. He let's them talk, give vent to their grief and lament, their shattered dreams, and only once they've gotten it all out does he try to steer them in a new direction, open their eyes to what's in front of them, what has been in front of them the whole time, new meanings to scripture, who the Messiah truly was and what he was meant to do. Slowly but surely, as their steps guide them to a stopping point of the journey, Jesus tries to open their eyes to what

they have witnessed—salvation, forgiveness of sins, the changing of the entire world through Jesus' life and death. Only then, once their feet have stopped moving, once their journey has brought them to where they can rest, does Jesus truly let them see where this walk has brought them, to the hope of resurrection. Their path isn't over and it certainly doesn't lead home to hopelessness, it leads back to Jerusalem to share the good news and to help the disciples carve out a new path, a new faith, a new journey that leads away from the cross and to the hope of resurrection. When they started walking there was no way these two men could have anticipated where it would lead them, essentially right back where they started, but with a whole new lease on life and faith, the better for the journey because Jesus accompanied them upon it, and completely changed their course.

We find ourselves very much in the same shoes as these men were in the beginning of the gospel, walking upon a path we never expected, never anticipated, and a little uncertain where it will take us. Around the world, churches are looking around them and going how on earth did we get here? And honestly, we all probably have our days when our *we had hoped* are readily available on the tips of our tongue. Those days when all feels lost and nothing feels hopeful and you sigh and just go, stupid virus, this is the *worst*. And it can nag at our faith too, wondering where God is in all of this,

why God isn't just *fixing* things, why resurrection has to be so closely tied to death. We can feel like we're wandering an Island road that knows no end, like we're just going to keep walking and walking, never finding our way home, our way back to what once was, to what is safe.

And yet...here in the gospel lies hope for this journey that we're on...because Jesus didn't stop these men's lament. He didn't tell them to forget about it and move on, even when he knew their reason for lament was gone. He let them *feel it*, own it, talk it through, and he just continued to accompany them on the way. And eventually, he steered their steps back towards hope. He didn't discount the pain and the frustration, but let them walk through it so that when their eyes were opened to what was in front of them, they could see clearly and *feel* that just as strongly as they felt their anguish. We need that more than ever. The permission to lament and the permission to hope, and to recognize that neither is better or worse, and we're going to feel one one minute and the other the next. But what never changes is that the journey always circles back to hope. Even along the darkest paths, even along the ones that feel never-ending, Jesus walks beside us and guides our steps towards hope.

Because here's the thing, for ourselves and for the church, Jesus has always been about a church, a people on the move. Jesus created a

following on the road, out in the world, in wild, varying circumstances, and it grew and it thrived. Jesus has always found people on the road, sometimes wandering, sometimes with a clear path before them. And that's who we are today, we are people on the road, on the move, we are the church in a different era, on a different journey than planned, but that's *always* what the church has been. The one constant is that Jesus is always walking alongside us. And I know, you're thinking, we're not on the move, we're stuck at home! And yes, we are, but that doesn't mean we're not moving, that the church isn't journeying and figuring things out as we travel this pandemic path. It doesn't mean our faith is stagnant and unchanged for the at-home-ness. We're just journeying in a new way. We're traveling a new path, and that's ok. It's scary for sure, but it's also lined with hope, because somehow faith, the church, ourselves, always end up better for the journey, even when it's hard and exhausting.

The story of God's people has always been one of a people moving from hopelessness to hope, from darkness to light, from one road to the next. That's our story. It might feel hopeless now and we can lament that and trust that we're still walking towards hope at the end of the journey. We're on the road together, a church sent out to walk the road laid before it, trusting that the stranger by our side may just be Jesus. **AMEN!!!**