

Claire Feingold Thoryn  
Theme: Journey  
Sermon: Wandering and Wondering  
June 7, 2015

### **Call to Worship**

Our worship theme this month is “Journey.” I was talking with Follen member Adria Goodson before church last week and we somehow got on the topic of space and the movement of planets. Since our universe is expanding, everything in the universe is moving out. So here we are on a planet that is turning on its own axis; while revolving around a sun; while the ellipsis itself is moving out towards the infinite bonds of space—and yet here we sit, not feeling as though we are in motion at all. We are on a journey together through space and time, whether we want to be or not! My fellow travelers, let us worship together.

**Reading:** “The Tables Turned” by William Wordsworth

UP! up! my Friend, and quit your books;  
Or surely you'll grow double:  
Up! up! my Friend, and clear your looks;  
Why all this toil and trouble?

The sun, above the mountain's head,  
A freshening lustre mellow  
Through all the long green fields has spread,  
His first sweet evening yellow.

Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife:  
Come, hear the woodland linnet,  
How sweet his music! on my life,  
There's more of wisdom in it.

And hark! how blithe the throstle sings!  
He, too, is no mean preacher:  
Come forth into the light of things,  
Let Nature be your teacher.

She has a world of ready wealth,  
Our minds and hearts to bless—

Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,  
Truth breathed by cheerfulness.

One impulse from a vernal wood  
May teach you more of man,  
Of moral evil and of good,  
Than all the sages can.

Enough of Science and of Art;  
Close up those barren leaves;  
Come forth, and bring with you a heart  
That watches and receives.

**Sermon:** Wandering and Wondering

There is an image you may have seen online, a birdseye photograph of two cities compared together.  
The top image is a perfect grid of streets.  
The bottom image is a mass of tangled curving streets.

On the top image it says  
“New York: Because we want you to know where you are and how to get where you are going.”

On the bottom image it says  
“Boston: because we hate you.”  
(Except it uses more pointed language!)

The legend has it that Boston’s streets are simply paved over cowpaths.  
That isn’t really the whole truth, of course,  
but it is part of the truth,  
and legends become part of our history.

We are stuck in traffic on paths created by large slow-moving animals who were seeking shade and water, that someone simply decided to pave.

Wordsworth complained about books, but I would say:  
Traffic! ‘tis a dull and endless strife.

The writer Barbara Brown Taylor tells a story from soon after she moved to the countryside. A friend from the city coming to visit her and got seriously lost.

These were the days before cellphones,  
so this friend was on her own with nothing but the directions Barbara had  
given her  
and a badly out of date map.  
Already an hour later than she wanted to be,  
she was speeding through a little town when she saw the lights of a police  
car in her rearview mirror.  
Busted, she pulled over on the shoulder of the road  
and had her license ready  
when the officer arrived at her window.

“I am so sorry,” she said,  
handing it to him along with her registration.  
“I know I was speeding,  
but I’ve been lost for the last forty minutes  
and I cannot find Tower Terrace anywhere on this map.”

“Well, I’m sorry about that too, ma’am,”  
he said, writing up her citation,  
“but what made you think hurrying would help you find your way?”<sup>1</sup>

“What makes any of us think that the place  
we are trying to reach is far, far ahead of us somewhere  
and that the only way to get there is to run until we drop?”

Hurrying is a soul-killer, and stopping our human tendency to hurry is a  
lifelong spiritual practice that I am still a novice at.  
But walking is a good way to stop hurrying.  
You can only go so fast when you are walking.

Our religious patriarch, Henry David Thoreau, wrote about his love of  
walking, and one of his stories was even turned into a children’s book,  
“Henry Hikes to Fitchburg.”

---

<sup>1</sup> BBT *Leaving Church*

In this book, Henry and his friend decide to go to Fitchburg, 30 miles away, to see the country.

They are depicted as very nice looking bears.

Henry decides to walk.

His friend decides to work until he has the money for a train ticket.

“Enjoy your walk!” the friend says.

“Enjoy your work!” Henry waves back.

(It’s a kid’s book, so I don’t think that line is supposed to be snarky, but I can’t help but read it that way.)

Henry’s friend sweeps out the post office.

Henry carves a walking stick.

His friend pulls weeds in Mr. Hawthorne’s garden.

Henry picks flowers and presses them in a book.

His friend moves furniture in Mr. Emerson’s study.

Henry climbs a tree.

Finally the friend has enough money for the train.

Henry is still seven miles from Fitchburg, happily swimming in a pond.

His friend sits on the train in a tangle of people.

Henry eats his way through a blackberry patch.

His friend gets off the train in Fitchburg as the sun is setting. He has beaten

Henry to their destination.

Henry arrives as night falls,  
and his friend says, “The train was faster.”

Henry says, “I know,”  
and he pulls a small pail from his pack.  
“I stopped for blackberries.”

What makes us think hurrying will help us find our way?

Rebecca Solnit, who wrote a book about walking, says  
“I like walking because it is slow,  
and I suspect that the mind, like the feet,  
works at about three miles an hour.  
If this is so, then modern life is moving faster

than the speed of thought, or thoughtfulness.”

Walking with others can be powerful:  
the March on Selma,  
the Mother’s Day Walk for Peace a few weeks ago in Boston;  
we walk together to make the world new.  
This week our lay ministers had a retreat, and part of it was engaging in the  
spiritual exercise of sacred listening,  
Some people decided to try the exercise while walking, others while sitting.

Afterwards, I was a little surprised to notice that the ones who walked with  
each other  
said they felt freer to speak  
and that they could listen better.

Side by side, sharing and listening,  
they moved together at the speed of thoughtfulness.

In 1953, a middle-aged white woman decided to move at the speed of  
thoughtfulness,  
and try to make the world think with her.  
Her name was Mildred Norman,  
but she called herself Peace Pilgrim.<sup>2</sup>  
She vowed to walk 25,000 miles for the cause of world peace.

She had already hiked the entire Appalachian Trail,  
the first woman to complete that walk in the woods.  
She started her walk in Pasadena and never stopped.

Her walking was her prayer,  
calling attention to her message—  
shared with anyone who would speak with her—  
of nonviolence and disarmament.  
She walked through every state, every Canadian province, and parts of  
Mexico.

---

<sup>2</sup> Philip Harnden *Journeys of Simplicity*

After she had logged 25,000 miles of walking, when she was in her 50s, she stopped counting her miles, and accepted rides every once in a while. She said she would remain a wanderer until mankind had learned the way of peace. She died in her 70s after almost 30 years of walking.

Peace Pilgrim was a follower of Jesus, and her only belongings were her clothes, that said on the front “Peace Pilgrim” and the contents of her pockets: a comb, toothbrush, ballpoint pen, and a map. She said in one interview:

“I haven’t got any money, and I don’t even accept any money, and I don’t belong to any organization, and I don’t own anything except what you see. This is me and my only earthly possessions sitting in this chair. I walk until given shelter, fast until given food. I don’t even ask. It’s given without asking.”

After Peace Pilgrim died her story kept walking, into the life of a young man named Daryl Watson.<sup>3</sup>

Daryl was a playwright who was wrestling with his relationship with God and with all the suffering he saw in the world.

In 2009 he learned about Peace Pilgrim and her mission. Daryl felt like the world was crazy and he was powerless, and here was the story of a woman who had seen and felt the same thing, and decided to do something about it.

So he decided he’d do the same thing. He emailed everyone he knew about his plan. He emptied his bank accounts and put all the cash in an envelope. He only took what he could carry in his pockets. He wrote “Peace Pilgrim” across the front of his t-shirt. And he started walking.

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/483/transcript>

But you know what, he did not have the same experience as the sweet silver haired white lady who started walking in the 1950s.  
Daryl was a tall young black man walking in 2009.

His first goal was to give away all his cash money.  
But even when he found a minister at a church,  
the minister was suspicious and thought he had stolen it, and refused his gift.  
Daryl ended up labeling the envelope of cash  
“for charity” and put it in the first mailbox he saw.

No one bought him food. No one offered him shelter. Police would stop him  
and search him, then let him go.  
He was tired and cold.

He'd only been walking for a few days, but he was almost dead from  
exhaustion, exposure, hunger and dehydration.

“What makes any of us think that the place we are trying to reach is far, far  
ahead of us somewhere and that the only way to get there is to run until we  
drop?”

Daryl the Peace Pilgrim walked until he dropped.  
And when he gave up, he actually found some of the peace he'd been  
seeking.  
He realized he'd made a mistake—and that was okay.

Years later, reflecting on the experience, Daryl told a reporter:  
“...If things ever get tough, I never think to myself, well, I could  
always just give everything away and try to walk across the country. I  
know not to have that thought, because I've done that, and it didn't  
work for me.”

Walking doesn't have to be a grand gesture,  
or a lifelong commitment, for it to bring you peace.  
A journey does not have to last 25,000 miles to bring you answers.

The destination isn't the point.  
Sometimes all you have to do is turn away from the rut, even for a little  
while, to see things in a new perspective.

Barbara Brown Taylor, whose friend was caught speeding, still lives in the country.

She has observed that even with hundreds of acres at their disposal, cows will still line up single file to walk down the narrow paths they've worn through the tall waving grasses in a field, to their favorite watering holes, shady spots, and clover patches. Sometimes these tracks are less than a foot across, about one-fourth the width of a cow. Yet the cows know exactly where to put their feet, without looking.

Rev. Taylor points out,

“in most cases these tracks mark the shortest route from point A to point B.

Where they do not, that is because the cows have found ways to get where they are going without expending too many calories.

In these cases, the tracks avoid both steep climbs and dicey descents,

choosing long stretches under leafy tree lines wherever possible.”<sup>4</sup>

The paths are safe, predictable, easy.

No wonder our Boston ancestors of legend paved over these already worn down paths.

And with hindsight we can ruefully admit, when we pave over the path that seems the easiest and most reasonable at the time, we may find ourselves stuck in a maze that is very hard to get out of.

Rev. Taylor says,

“Once you leave the cow path, the unpredictable territory is full of life.

True, you cannot always see where you are putting your feet...

---

<sup>4</sup> BBT *An Altar in the World* “The Practice of Walking this Earth” and “The Practice of Getting Lost”

You can no longer count on the beat-down  
red dirt path making all your choices for you.  
Leaving it, you agree to make your own choices for a spell.  
You agree to become aware of each step you take,  
tuning all of your senses to exactly where you are  
and exactly what you are doing.”

Step away from the path.  
Walk through the tall grasses.  
Leave the traffic behind.  
Hurrying will not help us find our way.  
Walk at the speed of thoughtfulness.

And hark! how blithe the throstle sings!  
He, too, is no mean preacher:  
Come forth into the light of things,  
Let Nature be your teacher.

Enough of Science and of Art;  
Close up those barren leaves;  
Come forth, and bring with you a heart  
That watches and receives.

May your journeys, wherever they take you,  
bring more peace into the world and into your heart.

*Amen.*