

## Guidance

*Romans 8:22-27 ~ January 22, 2017 ~ Heritage Lutheran Church*

***For we know that the whole creation has been groaning ... And not only the creation, but we ourselves, ... groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption ...***

Today we are going to be talking about the “guidance” of the Holy Spirit. At first this might seem like an exotic subject, but in this day and age “guidance” is a common thing. Do you remember the days when you had to work with paper maps and written instructions to get places? Now, we just enter our desired destination into a GPS device and by its “guidance” we find ourselves traveling by the fastest, safest, and most congestion free route.

Now the truth is that I have a love/hate relationship with GPS devices. My first device was a Garmin GPS that my wife named Marge. We called it “Marge-in-Charge.” This was an apt name for the commanding female voice that took total charge of our route with a strident set of vocal commands. As an interesting aside, our close friend, Marge Martins, retaliated by buying a “Tom-Tom” for their first GPS. I still don’t know whether she was offended by our GPS’s name or she just thought it was amusingly ironical.

Now the reason my relationship with a GPS is Love/Hate is because of the very nature of the guidance it provided for us. GPS devices are all programmed to believe that they know much better than their human owners the best route from point “A” to point “B.” Naturally this is the reason we buy them. We buy them because most of the time they do know the best route. However, the actual practice of interacting with a GPS device can be a mixed blessing.

What I’m thinking of in particular happens when you deviate from the expected route programmed into the device. Whenever we did that “Marge-in-Charge” would use her most strident voice to loudly announce, “Recalculating!” Now at first this seems like an innocuous way to inform an owner that an unexpected turn has taken place. But when we got to know Marge, we quickly figured out that the phrase, “recalculating,” really meant, “You idiot, you have taken a wrong turn and now I have to go to all the trouble of figuring how to get you out of this mess!” This occurred every time we pulled over for gas or stopped at a rest area. This is where the hate part of the love/hate relationship came from.

Now we come to the love part. I have to admit that I sometimes let my mind wonder on long cross country trips. There have been occasions when I missed critical turns without noticing it for a considerable length of time. This propensity has added significant detours to my travel. After Marge found her way onto the dashboard of my car, this never happened again. On several occasions Marge would announce that she was recalculating just as I missed a crucial exit or entrance. That annoying utterance suddenly became a source of great relief as I was able to correct the error in plenty of time to avoid a lengthy detour.

Now let's see if we can put this illustration to work in helping us to understand what St. Paul means when he says,

***For we know that the whole creation has been groaning ... And not only the creation, but we ourselves, ... groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption ...***

What do you suppose all this groaning is about? As Paul describes it, Creation itself is groaning. We could say that like Marge it is shouting, "Recalculating!" And not just little casual groans like the sigh of the wind through the trees, but a great groaning that reminds us of the pain of childbirth. The pain of preparation remains balanced on the hope of promise, but the agony of Creation is real. It hurts, wracking the Universe with sorrow. And Paul says that we believers feel creation's pain and join in it. Like the regret of missing a crucial turn in the route. It is the real pain of trying to remain faithful in such a faithless world while we strain forward toward the promises of God. We attach our faith moment by moment to the hope we have in Jesus promises. But where does this pain and groaning come from. This is what Paul is explaining when he says,

***And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.***

It is the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit that causes the groaning. The Holy Spirit brings the pain and travail to light. How can this be so? Isn't the Spirit's purpose to bring Joy and Hope? How can the Spirit bring pain? Well here is where the Spirit's work is so like Marge-in-Charge. The purpose of the spirit is to guide us in this life just as a GPS guides us across country. But like Marge's annoying announcement, "recalculating!" The Spirit's first act of guidance is to show us just how messed up the World is. The first fruits of the spirit are always repentance. The firstfruits of the Holy Spirit are like the

shout of King Josiah, when the rediscovery of the Book of the Law showed him how far Israel had strayed from God. He said,

***“...great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.”***

The firstfruits of the Spirit are like the reaction of King David when he felt convicted by the words of the Prophet Nathan about his sinful behavior with Bathsheba. He wrote...

***Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!***

When we start to talk about the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it is so easy for us to get carried away with thoughts of putting our foot to the right path. But the Spirit's first work of guidance is to show us how we have traveled down the wrong paths. The Holy Spirit's guidance reveals just how far we are from God. The Holy Spirit's guidance begins in demonstrating how messed up the world is.

Now at first this can seem quite discouraging. And Satan is quick to come alongside us in this difficult moment to make a full-fledged attempt to overwhelm us with despair. His delight is in the false teaching that life is not worth it. He wants us to surrender to hopelessness, letting our path devolve into directionless wandering. But the Holy Spirit has other plans for you, as God's beloved. When the spirit utters that enigmatic word, "recalculating," he brings hope, not despair. The Holy Spirit's first fruit may be to show us how far we have strayed from God, but his next work is to provide a path back to our loving Heavenly Father. This is the nature of the Holy Spirit's guidance. Saint Paul puts it this way...

***For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.***

God himself sends his Holy Spirit to guide us step by step in this life. Paul explains this when he preaches to the Athenians... ***"In him we live and move and have our being..."*** Our hope is an act of trust that the next turn in our path and the turn after that and the many turns following; do put us on a path into life with God forever. We are not left alone to find our way to God. God himself in the person of the Holy Spirit has come to

take us by the hand and guide us through. Only when we see our true predicament can we put our hand in the hand of God and follow his guidance. But the moment we do that, hope, true hope is born. It ignites in our hearts like a small flame. And like a miners light it gives enough illumination to see a little ways down the path, but never to its end. This is what Paul means when he says **hope that is seen is not hope**. The course of the entire path along which the spirit guides us is a matter of faith, not sight. We trust that it will bring us to Hope, as we put our trust in our lord and savior Jesus.

But there are moments when even the Holy Spirit's guidance seems insufficient to manage our fear. In those moments we feel like we are losing our grip on God's hand, or maybe even that he is letting go of us. These can be terrible moments for us. We are filled with great anguish about life. Perhaps we even feel that we must push God away in our anger and frustration, like a child who screams at his or her parents in a fit of anger. We imagine that we have thwarted God and driven him away. But nothing could be further from the truth. God is ready for those moments when we try to reject him. The Spirit is prepared for the moments when we don't know how to pray. St. Paul puts it this way...

***Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.***

This is a wondrous text when we really take in what it says. With gentleness, God himself bends his power to help us even in weakness. Even when we doubt, and sin, and fail in our faith, God's Spirit is there to support us and carry us. Even when our prayers fail, and we are ready to give up, the Holy Spirit himself prays for us, he prays in us, and he prays with us. It is prayer that goes deeper than words. It is a prayer that goes to the very foundation of existence in the groaning of God himself. It is the sound of Love and Mercy more deeply resonant than gravity itself. And its purpose is to be for us. Its purpose is to save us. Its purpose is to bring us home to God.

There is a well know story of a man who meets Jesus at the gates of paradise. Just as he is about to enter, he looks back on his life which appears to him as footprints in the sand. He can see places where there are two sets of footprints and other places where only one set existed. Turning to the Lord Jesus, he asked, "Lord I thought you were always with me in my life, why are there places with only one set of footprints."

“Dear Believer” Jesus responded, “The places with only one set of foot prints is where I carried you.”

This is the very nature of Paul’s message. The Spirit has come into this life to guide you. That guidance will reveal the truth about the world. The Spirit’s guidance will reveal the truth about you as well. You will be tempted to despair. But dear Christians, resist that temptation. You have not been left alone. God’s spirit has a way through this life for you. There is a plan that the Holy Spirit will guide you through on your way to everlasting life. And when your life becomes an overwhelming burden, God’s Spirit will not only guide you, but he will carry you. Trust him to grant you faith through his grace and love. And commend your future to his eternal care.

The cross is full. The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive and leading us out to go, make, baptize and teach disciples. Let us take up our cross and follow him.