

**Gizmos for the Journey  
July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

**Scripture: Romans 8:1-11**

**A sermon given by Rev. Dr. Stacey D. Jones on July 13, 2008  
at Northminster Presbyterian Church.**

The idea that the Christian life is something like a road trip is intriguing -- especially if you've ever actually taken a road trip with a carload of kids.

Yet, the analogy is not far off. Paul starts this great chapter in his letter to the Romans with the "Freedom Now" declaration that "There is ... now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." It's like, okay Christians, for the first time, you're ready to hit the road. You're free from the condemnation of the law, you're free to live in the Spirit, to embark on the adventure of your life, to know what it means to "walk in the Spirit."

While you're thinking about that, revisit the last road trip you took with your family, or think about the one you're planning to take this summer. When you pile in the minivan for your family vacation, it won't be like the road trip you took when you were growing up, when there was "nothing to do." You complained, and your weary parents said, "Look out the window and enjoy the scenery."

"Scenery? What scenery?" you thought. "This is the New Jersey Turnpike!" It didn't matter where you were at the time -- you could be in southern Idaho with nothing but sagebrush for as far as the eye can see, or in New Mexico flying across I-15 through light years of sand and rock -- and your parents still say, "Look out the window. Watch the scenery." My personal response was always "seen one tree, seen them all" or "seen one mountain, seen them all."

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These days, what's outside the car doesn't matter -- it could be a scenic Montana highway to Glacier National Park or a smoggy L.A freeway. These days, cars are self-contained entertainment and distraction systems. There are MP3 players on the dashboard, which is like having a 72-CD changer in the trunk. There are gadgets that "read" you the newspaper, or quote current stock prices, or give a sports update on the Chicago Cubs. Built-in TVs with VCRs or DVDs, PlayStations, Gameboys, GPS navigational systems and satellite radios are all on hand.

In the 21st century, kiddies in the back seat wear their wireless headphones, listening to their MP3s containing thousands of their downloaded pop or reggae favorites, while mom and dad can do something in cars they haven't done since before the babies came -- they can hold a lengthy, intelligent and uninterrupted conversation. New Millennium children fortunate enough to have the latest gadgetry and gizmos aboard actually ask their parents to go on long rides. "Please, please, please can't we please drive to -- like -- Hudson Bay?"

When we were kids, all we had were the Alphabet game, Twenty Questions, Pididdle, Punch Buggy and made-up games. Pretty tame stuff.

The point is, the journey for us as kids was bearable only if we were distracted and could forget we were taking it.

Now, kids are distracted, they are so thoroughly entertained, the journey has become the destination, and the destination a complete anticlimactic event that distracts from the real fun -- traveling!

Back to the apostle Paul. He uses the word "walk" to describe what's going on in our relationship with God. The walk, the journey, the road trip -- if you will -- can be of two varieties: a walk in the Spirit or a walk in the flesh.

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Paul discusses the glory of the former and the destruction of the latter. The first is a journey of life; the second is a march of death. The first is an experience of peace (v. 6); the second is hostility to God. The first is friendship with God; the second is enmity with God. The first is an experience of the indwelling God (v. 9); the second is the futility of a self-filled life.

In our spiritual life, Paul warns us against distractions, against "carnal" gizmos and gadgets that separate us from God. It's a chance missed. An opportunity lost. Paul calls us to leave distracting gizmos and gadgets behind and to look up and to look out through the window of the Holy Spirit to the spiritual landscape that is flashing by, a land which is ours to experience and enjoy.

It's easy to buy into the mantra about the journey: "It's not the destination that's important -- it's the journey." Yeah, yeah, yeah. Blah, blah, blah.

We know this already. So why do we insist on the distractions of the flesh just to make it through the road trip of life? Why do we buy into the mentality of Madison Avenue? Why do we spend our lives competing with our neighbors? Why do we watch so many hours of banality on television and then berate our children for hunkering down in the back seat with Gameboy? Why do we worship a culture of youth and beauty when youth and beauty don't come close to what it means to "walk in the Spirit." Why do we have so many time-saving gadgets that seem to take more and more of our time?

Paul says this is a walk. Perhaps not a walk in the park, but a walk. The Christian life is not a performance-based faith. The Christian life is not performance art. It is a walk, he says. The Christian life is an amble, a saunter, a promenade, a walk-about, a sallying-forth, a constitutional, a pick-me-up, and so forth. It is an experience. And as such it demands our full attention and appreciation.

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Thomas Merton was right when he wrote, "We are not so much entangled in our souls, as we are entangled in our minds." If we set our minds, again and again and again on gizmos of the flesh, if we allow our heads to be filled with distractions on the roadways of life, then our hearts, following the world and not God, will never find peace.

Where we put our minds, how we use our minds, what we think about, how much we allow ourselves distractions and entertainments -- all determine who we are and who we become. Paul makes it clear. The mind that is set on flesh, on earthly distractions, is hostile to the Spirit and separates itself from God. The mind that revels in the Spirit, whose focus is God, finds peace and life.

There's no gizmo for this journey.

A mind set on the Spirit, practiced in the ways of prayerful communication, one that seeks God and seeks to learn about God, begins to see the depth of love, the depth of beauty, the depth of joy, the power of hope, the power of courage and the power of commitment -- no matter where it happens to be on its road trip through life.

Ultimately, as the old spiritual says, "You've got to walk that lonesome valley. You've got to walk it by yourself. Ain't nobody gonna walk it for you. You've got to walk it by yourself."

It's up to each of us to choose which way we are going to go, the High Way or the low way, the way of the Spirit or the way of the world -- and ain't nobody gonna choose it for us.