

It's the Journey

First Sunday of Advent – 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, November 30, 2014

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

It is really good to be home with you this morning! For those of you who are sitting there saying to yourselves, "I didn't know he was gone," for the last week and a half I have been off a wandering, on a rolling retreat of sorts, traveling and living on a Greyhound bus, to the wilds of California and Nevada and back. Having returned just last evening, in time to take a very much needed shower, eat a wonderful homecoming Thanksgiving Feast Part II, and crash in my own soft bed, I got up *very* early this morning to too quickly record what I wanted to share with my dearest friends this morning from this venerable desk. It is *really* good to be home with you this morning!

Before I began my adventure, I explained to some of you who were questioning my very sanity, that traveling by bus allowed for a different perspective on the world that we are called to serve. With y'all, I am pleased to share the rich blessings of the small mid-America town we all call home, and the culture and values that come with it. As you watch the news, or spend time on social media, you are already aware, I have no doubt, that there are *other* aspects of American life that are, let's go ahead and say it, pretty *weird* to the way that we go about our day-to-day lives. And let me assure you, that spending even a *few* hours riding the highways and byways of America, packed together fifty or sixty at a time in a speeding motor coach, is a unique and wonderful, if sometimes a little *scary*, way to experience those differences.

Along the fifteen hundred or so miles of my wanderings, I collected a *lot* of stories, about a *lot* of special characters. And you know me, I am looking forward to sharing as many of those stories as I can with you as occasions arise. But the character to whom I want to introduce you this morning, is a guy I first encountered in the Greyhound station in less glitzy part of downtown Reno, Nevada, and with whom I shared the road through Thanksgiving night, and well through Friday as well, a guy who introduced himself as "Tim." If you saw Tim around here – well, you *wouldn't* – but if you *did* see Tim around here, I think most of you would find a way, discreetly and politely, I'm sure, to walk to other side of the road. I think Tim was probably about my own height, but he hunches shorter than that, maybe habitually if not physically hunched by years on the road. He wears a pair of oversized jeans that appear never to have actually been washed, obviously and unskillfully mended over the course of anybody's guess how long, with seemingly random patches of more colorful fabric. His upper body is layered in equally outsized garments, the outermost, a tattered Vietnam-era Army field jacket, and he carries an oversized pack wrapped loosely in some sort of blanket or quilt that is just as grimy as the rest of his kit. His skin, what shows of it, is tanned, or more accurately, *leathered* by long exposure to the elements, and apparently by the *lack* of exposure to any sort of cleaning products. Tim's most *prominent* feature, however, is his hair, a randomly tangled and grimy collection of what I think are called dread-locks, into which have been woven various odd and incongruous items of ornamentation. As we stood in line to board a bus in Salt Lake City, my curiosity got the better of me and I asked Tim about one of those ornaments, a key that looks to be permanently affixed to the top right side of his head. "Oh, that's to my *summer* place," Tim grinned, generously offering his *best* feature, "You know, where I keep my Porsche."

Though he was on his way to Wisconsin to stay with a girlfriend for a while, he said, Tim doesn't have any place in particular he calls home. I tried during my wanderings to use my ears more than my mouth – admittedly not my *usual* way of interacting with the world – and I tried to listen *especially* carefully to the thoughts of this obviously much more experienced wanderer as he chatted easily with anyone who bothered to engage him. The reason I decided that, of all the characters I met on the road, I wanted to introduce you to *Tim* this morning, was a conversation I overheard somewhere in the middle-of-the-night, somewhere in Wyoming, I think. "It really doesn't matter where you are," Tim said, "What really matters, is the *trip*."

Ah there's my thought for the First Sunday of Advent, the preacher in this wanderer thought, as I passed my ticket to the agent and emptied my pockets for a very rare security check before boarding yet another bus: It's not so much about the *destination*, as it is about the journey.

We all know Christmas is coming. How could we not? They used to wait until Thanksgiving weekend, but the networks have been playing Christmas specials for *weeks* already. Black Friday, Small-Business Saturday, and Cyber-Monday sales have been promoted for just as long. And down at Wally World, they were putting out the Christmas goodies while sweeping away the Halloween candy on October 29th. The twelve days of Christmas, which *begin*, by the way on December 25th, are still nearly a month away, but for most of us, and I do mean most of *us*, it's like it's already here.

For goodness' sake, don't stop your preparations for your joyous yearly celebration of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, born into our being, born into our time, born for us. Don't stop the lights and the decorations. Don't stop the carols and the holiday wishes and the Merry Christmases. And whatever you do, *don't* stop the holiday baking and candy making!

But Advent calls us to slow down a bit, to remember that our lives are about the living, to step off the seemingly ever-accelerating bus of measuring our lives only in terms of the next destination, the next transfer, the next smoke break, to understand that our lives are about the journey itself. All of time, you see, was created to give us the time to live, to give us the time to grow, to give *you and me* the time to learn to love.

Advent calls us to journey to Bethlehem and the beauty and grace born into our time one singularly wonderful night. Advent calls us too, to remember the *whole* of our journey. However long a span it is, we have been given our time to build our relationship with the One who formed us to love him, to build our relationships with the ones who travel with us. Our time, and time *itself*, will come to an end. Our journey together *has* a final destination, and our lives, our times, our *faithfulness* is about the whole of the journey. God himself is faithful, Paul assures us, and will strengthen us and give us what we need to complete the journey and stand in confidence before him at the end. And he is faithful as well, Paul says, not just for the endings, not just at the high spots, not just for the destination, but for the long haul.

It is really good to be home with you!