



## It's Not the Destination, It's the Journey    March 16, 2025

Last week we played Letterman's Top 10 Things You Might Hear on A Road Trip. Tying our spiritual Lenten journey to the metaphor of a road trip.

Today, we are playing Catch Phrase!

Again, connecting our journey in Lent to being on a journey in a car.

This is how we will play. I'll give the catch phrase and then you get 1 minute to shout out all your guesses. Then we'll see how many you got.

Here we go...**"What are the top 10 things to have in your car on a road trip?"**  
Go! Just shout them out, keep shouting them out...1 minute. (Let them know when you hear one that is on your list.)

Okay...did you say these things?

- **Snacks and Drinks/water**
- **Maps or GPS**
- **First Aid Kit**
- **Number of Triple AAA**
- **Comfort Items:** Pillows, blankets, and comfortable clothing.
- **Entertainment:** Music playlists, audiobooks, or podcasts
- **Chargers and Power Banks**
- **Sunglasses and Sunscreen**
- **Trash Bags**
- **Smart phone...GPS, number of Triple AAA**
- **Bonus:** emergency kit
- **Bonus:** wet wipes

It's just fun to have fun.

And another opportunity to continue to develop our road trip theme for Lent. And for today, that sometimes, it is about the journey or trip and not the destination.

That what we learn about God, others, and ourselves along the way is the most valuable, the best part.

It is a core truth in our lives to make plans for ourselves. We map things out, where we want to go, and how we want things to look in our lives. Some of us are better at this than others. But we all make plans and head out!

We can work for weeks, months, even years to arrive at a certain point in life, our own “Promised Land.” Pursuing a career, getting married, having a family, great hobbies. But sometimes our arrival and experience of our so-called Promised Land is not what we envisioned it to be at all. Sometimes we don’t even make it there.

Reminding me, someone said recently, **“If you want to make God laugh, tell him about your plans.”** Acknowledging that life is unpredictable, and God often interrupts and redirects us.

Or maybe we reach a kind of Promised Land, only to find out it is not the end of the journey. God is ever beckoning us on, to keep following.

And therefore, how can we as a church and as individuals stay open to God’s influence? What resources do we need to stay on our spiritual journey?

How can we let God reshape our vision of both the destination *and* the journey SO THAT we can find all the beauty and all the meaning that God has for us, all along the way?

I remember a time when I was working hard to get to my “Promised Land”, my vision of what I could make my life to be. I started out with good intentions, though my spiritual GPS was on track.

But I got sidetracked. Maybe I saw a billboard for the largest ball of twine or pie? Easily tempted by pie. Or was I distracted by simple temptations like self-sufficiency, willfulness, or lack of trust in God?

I’ve shared this before. About seven years ago, I had cobbled together something in my life that I thought was going to work for me. Working two jobs allowed me to pay my bills, including the \$800 dollars a month to pay back my seminary loan.

The church job allowed me to finish my Master of Divinity, become licensed, and ordained, to have the great joy of sharing the sacraments. Well on the way to my Promised Land!

Until, almost overnight, it felt like the engine seized up and conked out, engine light lit up in angry orange! Leaving me stranded on the side of the road.

The tax laws had changed and my role at the law office wasn't needed anymore. So, they reallocated my hours to digitize all their paper files.

Digitizing paper files for 18 hours a week opened my eyes. I realized I didn't like digitizing paper. And I realized my care job at church wasn't taking me anywhere. I became confused...my spiritual GPS had dropped its signal.

But what seemed like a bitter dead end in that basement turned into something that I wouldn't trade for anything in the whole world.

It was in that basement that I was found by the Living God. It was in that basement I experienced the beauty of foiled plans and the glory of derailed expectations that comes from being in relationship with God. Holy ground.

It was in that basement I learned more of God's unconditional love for me and glorious purposes for my life. That God had far better plans for me than I could ever have hoped for.

One of the great gifts of the Old Testament and the wanderings of the Israelites, is that it gives us is this deep truth that we are on a shared journey with God.

And how the Old Testament AND this text from Deuteronomy, gives us a sense of God's constant faithfulness to the Israelites as they wandered.

God's faithfulness from creation through their deliverance from slavery, through their wanderings in the wilderness and to show us the complexity of what it means to "arrive" (or not arrive) at the Promised Land.

And for us to be reminded that it's about the journey with God more than any destination.

Interesting to read this text with this perspective...that it is all about the journey. Often, it seems it is ONLY on the journey that we learn these essential, vital, precious truths about who God is and how God sees us.

The nature of a journey puts us in a position where we must learn.

Embedded in our text for today are some precious verses that prove that idea...the gift of the journey teaches us about who God is and who we are, as we read...

**"In a desert land he (God) found him (the Israelites), in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its**

**wings to catch them and carries them aloft. The Lord alone led him; no foreign god was with him.”**

This 32<sup>nd</sup> chapter is actually a new song Moses wrote for the Israelites. A song meant to highlight God's faithful care and provision in contrast to the ingratitude and bitterness of spirit, the unfaithfulness of the Israelites.

Specifically, we get this powerful image of the protective and empowering character of God's love. God's love is like the love of eagle parents with their young. Eagle parents' love in...stirring up of the nest, hovering over its young, spreading its wings to catch them and carry them aloft.

We covered those things in Early Word.

First, we have the stirring up of the nest. At the right time, with powerful downdrafts of their wings, the parents blow out all the soft downy feathers and leaves that made the nest uncomfortable.

Leaving the young a bit distressed, less comfortable, just pokey branches. The parents are motivating the young to strengthen their grip. \.

Then the hovering over the nest. At just the right time, the parents hover aloft with the meat in their talons, just out of reach. Again, to motivate the young to try to hop and fly to eat.

And then how the parents carefully watch over their young. Sometimes they hop right out of the nest and fall. But the parents swoop below and catch them, bring them aloft.

A picture of being perfectly cared for and safe.

Apparently, the catching on their wings of their young, is not what bald eagles do. But one father and daughter watched a golden eagle repeatedly raise their fledgling aloft on its wings, tipped them out, allowing them to fall...forcing the young to flap and try to fly.

Bible scholars believe that in this image of the eagles teaching their young how to fly is poetic license and implies that Israel is young.

That Israel is still in its youth, brought out of Egypt as a child and still learning to stand, walk, and follow their God in trust. That God's swooping in and carrying aloft to train Israel to fly is perfect, even better than eagle parents.

Last week, I mentioned spiritual amnesia. Do we ever forget who God is, forget God's loving care? Have we forgotten how good God is?

That God is our creator and Father and knows exactly what we need to thrive and flourish?

I had completely forgotten that God wants us to fly! And that maybe we settle for waddling around and quaking?

And this image of the eagle parents training and caring for its young points to an even more powerful and loving Heavenly Father. Showing us God's loving care and training for life and spiritual growth that our Father, longs to give us as his beloved people.

What a beautiful image! We get this image; we love our eagles here in Minnesota! Reminds me of the National Eagle Center in Wabasha. I feel a road trip coming on!

It is a profound metaphor, eagles teaching their young to fly mirrors God's love and purpose in growing us as his children, as his followers.

I have found a new way to understand my crisis in that basement. It was just God stirring up the nest, trying to motivate me to grow.

I was content. I like comfort. But I had forgotten God has created me to fly!? It can be so easy to settle.

But thankfully, God doesn't let us. And just as the fledgling trusts its parent to catch it, we can trust that God is always there to catch us, support us, even when we feel like we're falling or failing.

Do we believe this of our God? Do we trust God is this good, that God will care for us so completely and carefully each step of the way on our Lenten journey?

And what might you need on your journey, to stay on your journey with God? A reminder God wants us to grow? That we were made to fly? Or that we can trust in God's perfect care?

Or that we don't have to do this alone? We have each other as a church family. We have our Wednesday meal and fellowship, our services as a Lenten rhythm that offers support and encouragement, to help us stay connected to God.

We have simple resources, the Lenten Breakthrough Prayer and a roadmap of scriptures to guide us daily along the way...Are We There Yet?

A beautiful altar that reminds us we are on a journey with God AND that it is more about the journey than the destination.

**As we conclude, as we transition to a Time of Reflection:** Where are you in the process of trusting and following God on your Lenten journey?