

Sermon: From the Dales Way to the Jesus Way
13 Pentecost, Year B

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Emmanuel Church, Staunton
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When I was on my sabbatical, my husband Steve and I embarked on a long distance walk called the Dales Way, which begins in the town of Ilkley in the Yorkshire Dales area of northern England and ends in Bowness-on-Windermere in the Lake District. The company that organized this walk gave us all kinds of advice on what to bring and what not to bring. One thing they suggested we have with us was a whistle in case we got lost in the fog. We didn't bring the whistle. But they provided us with a map, a waterproof map. I love maps. They make me feel safe, secure and in charge! Maps are great. But they just don't tell you the whole story; they don't give you the full picture.

We found that on our walk sometimes it was easy to stay on the trail. For a long while the trail followed the River Wharfe, so as long as we could see the river, we felt secure in the knowledge that we were on the right trail. Most days we walked about 11-12 miles but for some reason that first day we were supposed to walk the longest stretch of about 16 miles. While that didn't seem logical I think it had been planned that way simply because of our lodging and the need to find an inn in an actual town. And of course on that first day, we got a little lost; the map failed us or maybe we failed the map! So we walked even further than we should have, and what would have been a long day ended up even longer.

There were sections of the trail that were well marked and other sections where the trail couldn't be discerned and the map was absolutely NO help. We would often fall adrift walking across a sheep farmer's field looking for just the slightest indentation in the grass, tilting our heads, studying the grass blades, looking for the trail, and then rejoicing when we saw one of those little Dales Way circular signs telling us we were on the right path.

I remember getting to one farm, we were a little lost (can you be a *little* lost?) and the farmer on a tractor, cutting hay, waved us on toward the right trail, never skipping a beat. I think he'd seen many a forlorn hiker before.

To stay on the trail, we found we did indeed need the map BUT sometimes we also found we needed a prayer, or a tangible circular sign, or intuition, or the help of each other over one more stone wall, or the kindness of a stranger.

Today we will baptize Elliot Pierre Owen. As we baptize Elliot, his parents and sponsors and you and I will make certain promises to help him follow not the Dales Way but the Jesus Way, which is the Way of Love. Our lectionary readings for today all point to the ways in which we are to do this. The collect of the day asks God to help us, "follow daily in the blessed steps of (Jesus') most holy life." As we go through the baptismal vows, we will give Elliot and his parents a map to help them find their way in the life of God. But just like the rest of our blessed liturgy, the words are not the end but a means to an end. The words don't give us the full picture. The words point us to the God of mystery and love, the God of redemption and renewal. In our Baptismal Covenant which we will all renew together today, we have a chance to refresh our own commitment to the Jesus Way.

When we get to the Baptismal Covenant I will ask you a series of questions and I hope you will listen very carefully to both questions and answers that focus on your relationship with God and just how we are to live that out: seeking and serving Christ in all people, loving your neighbor as yourself, striving for justice and peace, respecting the dignity of every human, every human being. (Aretha Franklin who died this week got that RESPECT part right, didn't she?)

These are big promises and none of us gets them all right at once. We practice and we slowly grow into them if we keep practicing. And we certainly need a lot of help along the way. Sometimes these words will be just the thing to get us on the Jesus Way, sometimes it will be with the help of a family member or a friend. Sometimes it will be the kindness of a stranger that helps us find our way. Sometimes a sign, sometimes a prayer.

One thing that happened when we were on our walk was THE royal wedding. As most of you know, our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry made quite the splash in preaching the way Michael Curry preaches at Megan and Harry's wedding. He preached about love and the source of that love being God. He called on us to be part of the Jesus Movement. (I have to say I was more than a little proud, more than a little happy to tell our hosts and fellow travelers, "He's my bishop, ya know?") Since then people have been asking him more specifically "How can we be part of the Jesus Movement?" He and his staff responded with the words you see printed on the cover of today's bulletin. It was initially shared at this summer's General Convention in Texas. This can be seen as a simplified map of our baptismal promises.

The Way of Love:

Practices for a Jesus-Centered Life

- **TURN:** Pause, listen and choose to follow Jesus.
- **LEARN:** Reflect on Scripture each day, especially on Jesus' life and teachings.
- **PRAY:** Dwell intentionally with God each day.
- **WORSHIP:** Gather in community weekly to thank, praise, and dwell with God.
- **BLESS:** Share faith and unselfishly give and serve.
- **GO:** Cross boundaries, listen deeply and live like Jesus.
- **REST:** Receive the gift of God's grace, peace and restoration.

Elliot, beloved Elliot, I pray you will follow Jesus, using the maps, the prayers and the people God puts in your path. There will be times you will get a little lost but God will always know where you are. You will know you are on the right path if you keep love at the center. I pray that as you walk the Jesus Way, that you will find yourself so smitten by his love that you can show the world, maybe just one small corner of the world, just what the love of God looks like. Amen.

