

A Journey to Hope:
Choosing Your Traveling Companions
Mark 10:13-16
Feb. 21, 2010

How many of you have ever taken a cruise? Just raise your hand if you have been on a cruise.

Those that were here for the Ash Wednesday Service know that I used a cruise analogy when talking about the Season of Lent. Like a cruise, this journey we will be on for the next 41 days will offer opportunities for wonderful experiences. I encouraged those on Wednesday night to let God be the Captain to take some risks and enjoy the ride.

One thing you get before you take a cruise is an Itinerary. I have an Itinerary for our Journey to Hope. I hope you will take one on your way out.

When you look at the itinerary you will see the different issues we will be addressing. Each Sunday we will focus on decisions we make concerning important circumstances in our life. I hope you will make an effort to be here for every stop on this journey.

Today our focus will be on our traveling companions.

Who is it that is on the journey with us?

Think about your family, your friends, and your fellow church members. These are your co-passengers! I think we would all agree that these companions have a big impact on how our journey goes.

In a positive way, these traveling companions make the journey more enjoyable. For years Elizabeth, Connie and I would take vacations by ourselves. Those trips were all enjoyable. For the past two summers however, we have gone away with Elizabeth's sister and her family. I have to say it has been nice being together with them. It's not like we do everything together, but having them there with us adds to the experience we have.

On our life's journey, those closest to us can greatly enhance the quality of our experiences. Through their encouragement and support we feel better

about ourselves. Knowing there are people pulling for us, we try even harder at what we are doing.

If you have been watching the Olympics, you have seen the impact families have had on the athletes. Friday morning I was watching the Today Show. On that show they had Evan Lysacek, the Gold Medal Winner in men's skating, and his family. Evan talked about how much his mom and dad and sisters helped him in his skating. Even while he was on the ice, thoughts of his family came to his mind.

When we have the right traveling companions, we put ourselves in a great position to succeed in anything we do. This positive energy helps us in work, in play, and in our faith.

It only makes sense, right? We are more likely to be true to God if we have more positive faithful people around us. If on the other hand our traveling companions are negative, demanding and critical, it's harder to succeed.

Our Scripture Lesson presents Jesus inviting the children to come to him. Did you hear what was going on? Let me read that verse from Eugene Peterson's message: "The people brought children to Jesus, hoping he might touch them. The disciples shooed them off. But Jesus was irate and let them know it: "Don't push these children away. Don't ever get between them and me.""

There are people, who intentionally or unintentionally, will do what they can to get between us and God. These folks see no point in God and try to convince those close to them to believe the same thing.

There are other folks that want so much time from family and friends, that it doesn't leave time for worship or other church activities. And though they are not trying to disrupt your faith on purpose, it still has the same affect.

If we find our traveling companions bringing us down, especially when it come to our relationship with Christ, we might have to consider making some changes. We can have a discussion with those negative forces in our lives. We can state what is happening to us and try to work out a new arrangement.

If that does not work, we can stay with those unhealthy companions and suffer the consequences.

The other option we have is to separate ourselves from that companion. If this person is family or a long time friend, this is not an easy decision. I know that!

If we are going to grow physically, emotionally and spiritually, we need to be around positive, caring, loving folks. I'm not saying you can't end up spiritually mature and emotionally healthy if you don't have the support. That is possible, but it takes a lot of will and determination.

This Lent is a good time to reflect on your traveling companions. Are these persons helping you or hurting you as you try to grow into your faith?

Speaking of Lent, we still have six (6) weeks to go till Easter. I would like to offer an opportunity for a specific way our fellow church companions can help us in our spiritual journey.

Remember when I said, others can positively impact our faith. We will have a chance to experience this during Lent. I would like us to be paired up as prayer partners. All during the remaining days of Lent we will pray for each other.

Those that would like a prayer partner, I invite you to take a blank offering envelope from the pew pocket, and put your name and the initials pp on it. During the Offering you will put that envelope in the Offering Plate. By placing it in the plate you are committing yourself to praying for the person you are matched with.

I will take those envelopes and make the matches. You will be notified by the end of this day of who your prayer partner is. I would encourage you to make contact with each other. In that conversation we can find out if there is any specific concern we can be mindful of.

Having folks praying for us is just one positive impact our traveling companions can have on us. Let us be grateful for those onboard with us. Let us commit to helping our traveling companions be the best they can be. And let us receive the care and nurture that comes from others and use it to bolster us on **Our Journey to Hope**.