

(5th Sunday after Pentecost)

The Psalmist, Dr. Seuss and God

"Oh, The Places You Will Go!"

"Congratulations! Today is your day. You're off to great places! You're off and away! You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose. You're on your own. And you know what you know. And you are the guy who'll decide where to go."

Psalm 139:1-12

"Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast."

If I were to choose a theme song for our reading of Psalm 139 and Dr. Seuss' – **"Oh, The Places You Will Go,"** I think it might be a Johnny Cash song called – **"I've Been Everywhere."**

If you were a fan of the "Man in Black," you might remember the lyrics: **"I've been everywhere, man. Crossed the deserts bare, man. I've breathed the mountain air, man. Of travel, I've had my share, man. I've been everywhere. I've been to Reno, Chicago, Fargo, Minnesota, Buffalo, Toronto, Winslow, Sarasota, Wichita, Tulsa, Ottawa, Oklahoma, Tampa, Panama, Mattawa, La Paloma, Bangor, Baltimore, Salvador, Amarillo, Tocopilla, Barranquilla, and Padilla, Boston, Charleston, Dayton, Louisiana, Washington, Houston, Kingston, Texarkana, Monterey, Ferriday, Santa Fe, Tallapoosa, Glen Rock, Black Rock, Little Rock, Oskaloosa, Tennessee, Hennessey, Chicopee, Spirit Lake, Grand Lake, Devil's Lake, Crater Lake, Louisville, Nashville, Knoxville, Ombabika,"** and the list goes on.

By the time he lists all the places he has been, well, it seems he has been everywhere.

So let me ask, where are some of the places you have been in your life?

Let me ask it this way, "How many states have you visited?" Has anybody visited all 50?

By my personal count, I have been to 34 states. I still need the northwestern states, plus Alaska and Hawaii.

"I have been everywhere, man..."

There are a few places I dream about visiting someday. Ah, Key West!

Oh, the places we have been and the places we hope to visit!

For all the places we have been or dream about going, there are places none of us really want to go in life, yet, find ourselves there from time to time.

Seuss talks about those more metaphorical places like being in a **Lurch**, or finding ourselves in a **Slump**, or discovering we are **Lost**, without any direction, unsure of where to go next in our lives.

Then there is the **Waiting Place**. We all have been there, haven't we? Waiting in a line for a train, or a bus or plane or the mail to come or the phone to ring, or sleep to come or morning to dawn, or waiting around for Friday night or love to begin or a better break or another chance.

I would imagine that we all have found ourselves in similar types of places at some point in our lives. How many of you have been in that Waiting Place – like a doctor's office, waiting to hear the test results or how a surgery went?

Sam and I are reading John Steinbeck's "**The Grapes of Wrath**." I think about the place the Joad family, and many others, lived during the Dust Bowl. Farmers connected to the land, only to be forced from it due to the circumstances larger than themselves. Now they must go from this land, their farms and homes, and communities, to a new place.

How many people have found themselves in similar circumstances, forced to move because of work, migrating from one place to another?

While up on Washington Island, I picked up a copy of the book – **Janesville: An American Story**. Yes, it is that **Janesville**. Written by Amy Goldstein, it is the story of what happens to the people of Janesville after the last SUV rolled off the GM assembly line back in 2008. Similar to the people from Oklahoma, who like the Joads, were called "Okies," people in Janesville, who were forced to find new work, some traveling to jobs hundreds of miles away in other states, are known as "Gypsies."

While we all may have faced difficult economic times in our lives, when we had to make life decisions that affected our families and our future, I can't begin to imagine what it must be like to leave your family your homes, your community, everything you had ever known and a future you had planned on and have to move to some place new.

Immigrant families, refugees, Okies, Janesville residents, neighbors, or family members, maybe even you, have, due to circumstances beyond their control, been forced to make these decisions. It is the story of us all, as humans, migrating, settling, and moving on again, and again to new places.

There is another book I have read, maybe you have read it as well, that tells this exact same story. It is called the Bible. From the very outset, we are a people of immigrants, migrating from one place to another, sometimes by choice, sometimes because of war or economic hardships, crossing borders, living as strangers in a stranger and foreign land, always in search of that promised land.

"Go from your country, your kindred, and your father's house," God says to Abram, **"to a land that I will show you."** The amazing thing is that without even knowing where he was headed, the writer of Genesis tells us that Abram, Sarah and their extended family went.

Throughout our sacred story, God calls people to new places, and they go!

Joseph finds himself thrust into a new place, and in an ironic twist, his brothers are forced to follow due to a famine in their land. **Moses**, who out of fear runs for

his life, hiding out in the desert, hears God speaking to him from a burning bush. Brothers mending nets by the seaside are called to go and become "fishers of people." **Saul** who is traveling one road, is struck blind by a Light, and in that moment, hears the voice of Christ calling him to a new place.

Oh, the places we are called to go as followers of Jesus!

Friends, we are called by God to go in faith, into unknown, risky places that frighten us, where we might literally be faced with death, and death is a place we all will go one day. But God does not call us to go from the cradle to the grave, and all places in between, without traveling companions.

We do not go alone. We go together. Roger Nishioka, in his book, **Rooted in Love**, tells the story of a little girl who, new to a church, went running into the sanctuary one Sunday morning. Another little girl saw her running and yelled "**Hey, in our church we don't run!**" The girl stopped in her tracks. The girl who yelled then smiled, and said, "**In our church, we don't run. We run together!**" An joining hands, they ran out of the church, together.

In God's world, we don't go it alone. We go together. And no matter where we go, no matter where we find ourselves in life, even when it feels like we are overwhelmed and all alone, even as we face death, God is with us, before us, beside us, around us, and within us, all the time, from birth to death, and beyond.

"Oh, where can I go from you spirit?" sings the Psalmist. **"Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast."**