

## The Roadway of Faith

Jeremiah 14:7-10,19-22

Psalm 84:1-6

2 Timothy 4:6-8,16-18

Luke 18:9-14

When I lived in Colorado, I was in the San Juan Mountains, just below the peaks that formed the Continental Divide. To travel East, there is one road available. It is a two-lane highway called Slumgullion Pass that ascends almost three thousand feet in elevation in under ten miles. There are no guard rails, but plenty of sheer cliffs. The first time I traveled that road, coming into the valley for the first time, I lost feeling in my fingers from clutching. Most of the road is shouldered by dense trees, but there are a few places where it opens up, and the vistas are unbelievably spectacular. The beauty is compelling, if you can force your clenched eyes open to notice.

My experience with the road seemed to be relatively universal. At first, I was terrified. The posted speed limits seemed stupidly high. Every single turn had a warning sign that showed a steep corner with a car rocked over on two wheels, and an accompanying slower speed. But I couldn't figure out how anyone could make the turns at even those reduced speeds. But after a while, you can get used to anything, and I gained confidence and eventually learned that road like the back of my hand. But every year people go off that road. Drivers become overconfident or get distracted, and they go off the edge. Traveling Slumgullion Pass is not exactly safe, but if you want to get to the other side of the mountain, it's a road that must be travelled.

Our life of faith is like that. We are invited on a journey to a place we want to be, but the roadway is not entirely safe. We face threats and obstacles, we can't see around every corner, sometimes we'd rather slow down or stop altogether, but even that doesn't guarantee the security we desire. It is only traveling with God, at every turn, that we find the resources we need to navigate this road. And it is only on this road that we encounter the beauty of knowing God, that is the gift of faith.

Today is Pledge Sunday. We have spent a month discerning how God would have us steward our resources in 2026, which is a difficult thing to do even when the world feels safe and our future clear. But our world doesn't feel safe, some of us and the people we love are wondering how bills will be paid and how medical expenses will be covered in the upcoming year. Walking through uncertainty is scary and vulnerable. God is with us on the highway of faith, but sometimes it can be difficult to trust or feel God's presence. When the road ahead feels uncertain, the speeds too fast, and the cliffs too close, God stands ready to help. Today's readings offer us a roadmap for how to traverse this road with faith. When so much feels outside of our control, we are not powerless. We can position ourselves to receive the help we need when we remain humble, intentional, and tenacious.

Jesus taught today's parable to help us remember the value of humility. None of us enjoy feeling humbled; we prefer to feel powerful, strong, and capable. But when our strength feels sufficient, we don't seek God's resources. Looking to our own strength limits our resources to the things we know, the things we can see and calculate. The benefit for the humble is seeing the limitations of their own resources and seeking God's assistance in providing beyond those limitations. Wisdom counts the dollars in our bank account, but faith knows God owns all the banks and everything in them.

The opposite of humility is pride. Not only is pride problematic because it fails to recognize one's own limitations, but it looks with contempt on the humble. I'm ashamed to admit that, while driving Slumgullion Pass, I became the contemptuous driver who looked down on those who navigated the road cautiously. One time I came up fast behind a car traveling significantly below the posted speed limit. In my arrogance, believing I knew what lay ahead, I allowed my annoyance to mount until we came around the corner at, what I felt was a turtle's pace, only to find a tree had blown across the road. If I had not been slowed down by the cautious driver's scruples, I might not be standing here today. No matter how confident we may be at any moment in this life, none of us know what the

next turn holds. The humility of looking to God, rather than our own resources, even when our coffers and bellies are full, even when our futures feel secure, will be our safeguard when the path takes an unexpected turn.

In Jesus' parable, two men went to the temple to pray. Both men recognized their need to go to God. One man went because it made him look and feel superior. The other man went because he knew God was his only hope. The prideful man looked in scorn at the humble man. But God loves to humble the prideful and exalt the powerless. So, as much as no one enjoys feeling humbled, if we want to position ourselves to receive God's resources, we ought to consider the areas where we feel independently confident from God as well as the people over whom we look down our noses.

Faith requires humility. It also requires intentionality. In our reading from Jeremiah, God's rebuke comes because the people "loved to wander" and "have not restrained their feet". When we are traveling this road of faith, it is easy to become distracted. When things are not going the way we want, when we're scared, or worn out, it can be difficult to remember where we're headed and why we're even on this road at all. We can start looking around for something that looks or feels better or safer. When God scolded the people for wandering away, they accepted the rebuke. They acknowledged their waywardness, refocused their attention and reaffirmed that, "we set our hope on you". Hoping in God is not always something that happens automatically. We must train and retrain ourselves to keep our eyes on the road, make intentional choices to keep the faith, and to look for God's guidance.

A lack of intentionality on this journey of faith can be devastating. In Jeremiah, the people recognized their deviation from the path was because they had followed the waywardness of their ancestors. The people who go before us and the people we find with us on our journey are not an automatic guarantee of faithful intentionality. One year a pothole developed near the edge of the road on Slumgullion Pass and people started going around

it. Consequently, the pavement on the road's edge began crumbling. One day I followed the tracks around the pothole and found my tires sucked into the sandy shoulder. That shoulder was less than six inches from the cliff's edge, and I almost lost control. I had taken it for granted that I could just follow everyone else's path. Choosing to intentionally follow God rather than the prevailing culture or the most persuasive voices around us can require a lot of attention. But God guides us. Jeremiah affirms that God is "in the midst of us", so we can always be confident of that guidance when we look for it.

This path of faith requires humility and intentionality. According to Paul, it also requires us to be tenacious. In Paul's letter to Timothy, he writes about encountering the end of his life. He says the famous words, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith". Notice what he does not say. He does not say that he raced faster or better than anyone else. He does not say he won. He simply stayed on the path that was laid for him. He promises the reward for the journey is available to everyone who looks to God along their own path. We do not need to be better than anyone else. We must merely **continue** with our eyes fixed on Jesus.

The Psalmist illustrates the life of faith as a worshiper climbing a mountain, going from height to height, not giving up, with eyes fixed on God who will be fully revealed at the journey's end. The journeyer in the Psalm traversed through a desolate valley before ascending the steep climb. Nothing about the journey is promised to be easy, but the Psalmist affirms the happiness of those who travel with God. If our joy is flagging, it may be because our eyes have drifted from Jesus to the cliffs.

We find confidence in the life of faith through our humility, our intentionality, and our tenacity. God's resources for us are always sufficient and the beauty found along the way is unmatched!

May we be a people who walk by faith.