

I

When I was a kid, in order to pass the time on those long family road trips, my dad taught me how to calculate our estimated time of arrival at the next town or landmark using a paper road map, a pencil, and algebra. Nowadays, when my kids want to know how much longer to our destination, I simply glance at the cell phone mounted on the dash and tell them exactly how many more miles and give them an up-to-the-second time of arrival.

The navigation apps on our cell phones have become so finely tuned that if they detect a traffic jam up ahead, they can automatically update our arrival time, let us know how long the delay might be, and sometimes, they'll even automatically suggest an alternate route around the problem. Our oldest boys will turn ten years old this week, and we've traveled thousands of miles with them on family road trips over the years, but I'm not certain that they've ever even seen a paper road map.

II

All this precision and instant information available at our fingertips is made possible by something we rarely even think about.

Somewhere high above us, at this very moment are about two dozen satellites that are constantly beaming a signal down to the earth. When we're using a navigation application, our cell phones are constantly tuning into those signals and using them to calculate our

exact position on the surface of the globe, which is of course where this whole setup gets its name – the Global Positioning System. We can't see the signal with our eyes or hear it with our ears, but those satellite signals are there 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. They're beaming into this room at this very minute, and they're beaming to wherever you are right now. B

But for those invisible signals to be effective in our lives, for them to have any use at all, we have to find a way to tune into them. And when we're on a journey, especially on a road that we've never before traveled, those signals are most useful when we're constantly dialed into them.

III

And that brings us to our story for today. Last week, we kicked off our read through the Book of Acts. And when we come to our story for today, the disciples are in uncharted territory. They are traveling a road they've never traveled before. Just before the passage we'll read this morning, they watched Jesus ascend into heaven, and as he was going, he promised them that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit had come upon them, and that they would be his witnesses, beginning in Jerusalem, then out to Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth.

And so when we pick up our story today, the disciples are at something of an in-between place, navigating a road

they've never traveled before, and wondering what comes next.

So with that background in mind, listen now for a Word from God from Acts 1:12-14.

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

When we meet the disciples today, we find them navigating a road they have never before traveled. Jesus has ascended into heaven and made these incredible promises to them about what is yet to come, but they find themselves in something of an in-between place, between what was, and what is yet to come.

We know that this small group of women and men will go on to do incredible things in the name of Jesus Christ. We know that some will go on to become preachers, and some will go on to become missionaries. We know that some will be martyred for their faith.

We know that some will live long lives of faithful obedience. We know that 2,000 years later, churches around the world and right here in the United States will bear their names with honor.

But they don't know that. All they know is that Jesus has ascended and promised them of things yet to come, and that they are small in number, poor in resources, and wondering where this road will take them.

And so they did what Jesus taught them to do. Did you hear it in the story? All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer.

The text doesn't tell us what the specific content of their prayers were. But this doesn't sound to me like the prayers they might have said at mealtimes and bedtimes. This doesn't sound like "rub a dub dub, thanks for the grub, yay God," kind of prayer. They were constantly devoting themselves to prayer.

IV

My friend, I suspect that in your life right now, you're navigating some sort of road that you've never before traveled.

Maybe you're in a position of leadership in a business or a school or a nonprofit organization and you're trying to figure out how to navigate this particular phase of the pandemic.

Maybe you're navigating a new stage of life. You've sold your home and

moved into new quarters and getting accustomed to your new surroundings. Or you're the parent of someone who is growing up before your very eyes, and you're navigating this new stage and understanding of your relationship and its boundaries.

Maybe you're grieving someone, and you're not only navigating the often bewildering season of grief, but also the mountains of paperwork and business that always accompanies death.

Maybe you just find yourself today in that uncomfortable place that is in-between places, traveling an unfamiliar road, and you're worried that you might easily become lost.

If that's you, my friend, you're not alone, and you're certainly not the first child of God that has ever passed this way. And as you navigate this uncertain path, I encourage you to look to the example of your ancestors in faith. They were constantly devoting themselves to prayer.

Not just at mealtimes or at bedtime. Not just for an hour or so on a Sunday morning. All of them were constantly devoting themselves to prayer.

They were different people with different gifts and different worldviews and different experiences. And as we will see as we continue to read through Acts, they will go on to different ministries within the church. But all of them were constantly devoting themselves to prayer.

My friend, not every disciple of Jesus can be a preacher. Not every disciple of Jesus can be a prophet or an apostle or a teacher or a missionary or a martyr. But every disciple of Jesus can be devoted to prayer.

Some might say, but that's so impractical. There are so many things in the world that need doing. Jesus calls us to heal the sick and bring sight to the blind and to liberate the oppressed.

And you're right, of course. Jesus did all those things and more and calls us to follow him. But Jesus also devoted himself constantly to prayer. Not just on the Sabbath day. Not just at mealtimes. Constant communion with God through prayer was what sustained him in his earthly ministry, and it's what will sustain you, too, my friend.

But just like that GPS satellite signal, it's always on, but it will only be as effective as you let it be.

Maybe you already have a robust prayer life. Or maybe you're a bedtime and mealtimes kind of person. Or maybe you're a once-in-a-while-when-you-think-about it kind of person. Maybe you don't know how to pray, or where to begin.

If that's you, let me offer you a piece of advice from an old ad campaign. Just do it. Or, as the 12-steppers say, take the action, and the feeling will follow. You might need to experiment for awhile to find what works for you.

Sometimes I find it helpful to pray out loud in my car on my way to

and from work. I just talk to God and tell God what's on my mind. You don't have to be a poet or have a degree to pray. All you need to do is to tune your heart, as the old hymn says, to sing God's praise.

V

All of these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer.

These are uncertain times for us as a community of faith. As we emerge from the pandemic, as we wrestle with all the implications of the latest election and what it means for our shared life together, as we take a long look at how we are called to live together as a diverse community and all that implies about our past, present, and future, we are navigating a road that has never before been traveled.

Yes, of course, the church must be about the work of building the kingdom of God. Yes, of course, the church must be about the work of doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God. Yes, of course, the church must be about the work of proclaiming the good news to the poor, bringing release to those captive to sin, bringing sight to the blind and healing to the lame and proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor.

But as we go about that work, if we are not dialed into the voice of the Holy Spirit, if we are not constantly devoting ourselves to prayer, if we are not having regular communion with God, then it will be far too easy for us to

mistake the noise of the world for the signal of God. If we just rely on our own sense of direction, if we just strike out on our own and say, "This way seems it will get us where we want to go, and one road is as good as another," it will be far too easy for us to take a wrong turn. As we travel these unknown roads, as we walk together, may all of us be constantly devoting ourselves to prayer.

Thanks be to God. Amen.