

Text: Philippians 2: 1-11  
Title: For Navigational Purposes  
Date: 09.03.17  
Roger Allen Nelson

Quetico Provincial Park is an endless maze of lakes, islands, and bogs carved out of Canadian shield rock. It's 460,000 acres of remote rugged wilderness adjacent to the 3,900,000 acres of Superior National Forest in northern Minnesota. And, it's only accessible by canoe or kayak.

There are no roads.  
There are no signs.  
There are no lights.  
There are no cell signals.  
There are no creature comforts.  
There's no GPS.

Therefore, you navigate by a sort of topographical map that shows lakes and islands and narrow-boulder-strewn-paths that lead to other lakes and islands and narrow-boulder-strewn-paths. Some of the lakes are as deep and wide and long as you can see, and some are small cathedrals hemmed in by pine trees and towering rocky cliffs, but with 2000 lakes in Quetico it can all too soon blur together. It's easy to be disoriented. It's easy to get lost. You find yourself looking at the map saying, "I think that island there is this island, and that means we need to cut through there, and start looking for that campsite. Yeah?" Oh! And by campsite, I mean a pile of rocks where someone else camped...

However, while canoeing in Quetico this summer I noticed that written in the top corner of our maps was the phrase: "... not for navigational purposes."

Not for navigational purposes?  
What else is it for?  
We're in the middle of nowhere.  
This is all we have.  
What do we do when we're lost?  
Not for navigational purposes?

Dear friends, everybody needs a map.

In an endless maze of post-modern complexity, with thousands of voices clamoring for our attention, with a strained and splintered body politic, with images and information from every corner of creation accessible in seconds, with tribes and terror and technological disruption it's easy to get disoriented. It's easy to get lost. Everybody needs a map.

For 15 years Philippians 2:1-11 has been a sort of map for Hope Church. It's helped chart our course, provided guiding landmarks, and pointed us toward home. Therefore, every few years, we get out the map to find our bearings. This morning we look at this text for navigational purposes.

Whenever we arrived at a place to camp in Quetico a couple guys would fish for dinner while I foraged for dry wood. I chopped off branches, took down dead trees, and split logs until we had plenty of firewood, because every night we sat around the campfire in the comfort of friendships that go back better than thirty years.

We find our place on the map ~ together.

At its best Hope is a web of mutual dependency. Some of you have found authentic community at Hope. You have raised children together, weathered storms together, gone on trips together, and built a life sustaining web together. You have some expectation that ham buns will be served at your funeral by those seated around you. You may have better friends in other places, but you know that church is an intergenerational web of mutually dependent people.

The beginning of this morning's text is addressed to a community. If there is  
a common encouragement from being united with Christ,  
a common comfort from love,  
a common fellowship with the Spirit,  
a common tenderness and compassion,  
a common joy, then it will be found in life together.

Our journey together does not depend on preaching panache, musical styles, liturgical sensibilities, or programs and projects, but in how we love one another, welcome the stranger, enfold new friends, care for the aging, forgive, practice hospitality, and make space for a variety of perspectives and orientations.

And it's not easy. When we live from Bourbonnais to Berwyn, from Lansing to New Lenox, community is difficult. New people wonder how they will find substantive connections, old people harbor old habits, and we've all got boatloads of issues....

But, truth be told the trail is going to get narrow and boulder strewn. At times, we all get lost in the weeds and we don't know which way to go, or how to carry on. At some point, we're all shattered. And yet the promise of life in Christ is that we're not alone. We're in the canoe together.

You are not alone.

The first landmark is authentic community.

Our map reads that our "relationships with one another," would arise out of the same "attitude of mind." It's an odd phrase because the translator is trying to communicate that "mind" means more than brain activity or rationality; it is the fullness of human disposition, psyche, worldview, and a way of relating to creation. And therefore, to follow Christ is not just to be part of a community, but it invites a habit of heart and mind.

David Brooks, moderate-conservative-New-York-Times-columnist, wrote recently,

*We're living in the middle of a national crisis of solidarity — rising racial bitterness, pervasive distrust, political dysfunction. So, what are the resources we can use to pull ourselves together? What can we draw upon to tell a better American story (than the one*

*Donald Trump tells), one that will unite us instead of divide us, and yield hopeful answers instead of selfish ones?*

We draw on scripture and the resources of the reformed tradition to tell a better story. We look to the way and will of God as found in Hebrew holy writ and embodied in Jesus to unite us and yield hopeful answers. Even with all of its complexity and obscurity we find our bearings in this ancient text and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

But, that calls for a measure of biblical literacy in a post-biblical culture; that calls for the deep roots of the reformed tradition in a rootless world. And, that calls for some manner of investment of time, energy, attention, self....

That means Bible study, wrestling with sermons, reading beyond what's devotional, listening to the voices of others, reflection, meditation, consistency in worship, doing stuff alone and with your family, and helping with Hope's abundant blessing of babies and baptisms and children in education programs....

Whew!

For navigational purposes, we're called to transformation by the renewing of our minds. I know that smacks of religious rhetoric, and I know we have to reckon with the reality that faithful thoughtful Christians arrive at vastly different interpretations of scripture, but a second guiding landmark is education ~ learning the mind of Christ.

The second half of our text is often referred to as the "Christ Hymn." The early church already had Hebrew psalms but this is one of the first distinctly Christian hymns. Therefore, it's helpful to think of the first verses of our text as if a preacher was encouraging a congregation, stirring them up, building to some sort of homiletical high point...

*In humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each to the interests of others. In your relationships with one another have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had: Who...*

And then just at that crescendo the preacher breaks song.

*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his advantage; rather he made himself nothing....*

This is where Erin Pacheco should be preaching because out rolls this beautiful hymn about the movement from deity to death. The Greek word for it is *kenosis* ~ emptying. This early hymn proclaims the staggering mystery of the self-emptying God.

When church is often measured by how we feel when we leave, or what's in it for us, the reminder in this text is the calling to *kenosis* ~ the self-emptying of Jesus Christ. And that is to say that we're a liturgical country club or a pencil-necked book club if our life together is little more than community and education. To be shaped in the mind of Christ is to be engaged in this world in love and service.

A third landmark is servanthood, mission, cultural engagement, *kenosis*....

We exist to empty ourselves for the sake of others. That's hard to define and even harder to live into, but for navigational purposes that's the guiding goal. By vocation and avocation, we're called to pursue, bear witness to, and empty our very selves for the sake of creation's *shalom*.

For navigational purposes Hope exists for community, education, and servanthood. And that would seem like enough, but there is one last guiding landmark.

One of the gifts of canoeing in Quetico is being completely off-grid. All of the chaos and clatter fades away and you are reminded that creation is doing its thing with little regard for the noise and anxieties of our lives. Rocks from the earth's core, lakes carved out by glaciers, night skies perforated by stars, the call of loons, a cool summer breeze, birch trees sprinkled against pines.... they're all just doing their rightful thing in praise of God. They were doing it long before we arrived and they'll be doing it long after. Every square inch of creation is joined in glory to God.

When we gather together in worship we are joining in the last stanza of our text and the ultimate destiny of all creation, when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Our worship is simply joining in the chorus that began long before us and will continue long after.

So, dear friends, these landmarks guide our journey: community, education, servanthood/mission, and worship. They are the islands that help us chart our course. We try to do nothing more, and nothing less than faithfully keep our eye on those navigating landmarks. And, therefore, in the next few months we will....

Open a second Children in Worship space. Unveil a new website with sermon podcasts and on-line giving capabilities. Move Adult Education into the sanctuary with better sound and video technologies. Turn the atrium into a more comfortable and quieter place for coffee after worship. Start a new season of YEEPS with a very cool team of young adult leaders. Develop the Narthex Hospitality Team. Grow into our commitment to shared voices in liturgy and music with Erin Pacheco's consistent leadership. Hatch and offer leadership in the "Rooted" worship services at Trinity Christian College. Shoot for an intergenerational service trip to a church of transient folks in Austin, Texas. Double down on our partnership with Roseland Christian Ministries. Begin another Narrative Lectionary preaching series, with all new texts, that traces the full sweep of scripture's story. Fill every open space we have with Sunday School classes. Etc. Etc.

We will still lose our way at times. We will get caught up in currents that distract and pull us into the weeds. We may even wonder if our map gives us enough information to navigate a journey that at times can feel overwhelming. But! But, in broad strokes, at Hope, we will keep coming back to community, education, *kenosis*, and worship for navigational purposes.

Amen.