

*The Path Beyond Bethlehem:*

*Seeing Deeper Truths:*

*"How Do We Get To Heaven From  
Milwaukee?"*

1 Corinthians 15:42-58; Luke 6:27-38  
February 24, 2019

START CLOSE IN

Start close in,  
don't take the second step  
or the third,  
start with the first  
thing  
close in,  
the step  
you don't want to take.

Start with  
the ground  
you know,  
the pale ground  
beneath your feet,  
your own  
way to begin  
the conversation.

Start with your own  
question,  
give up on other  
people's questions,  
don't let them  
smother something  
simple.

To hear  
another's voice,  
follow  
your own voice,  
wait until it  
becomes an  
intimate  
private ear  
that can  
really listen  
to another.

Start right now  
take a small step  
you can call your own  
don't follow  
someone else's  
heroics, be humble  
and focused,  
start close in,  
don't mistake  
that other  
for your own.

Start close in,  
don't take  
the second step  
or the third,  
start with the first  
thing  
close in,  
the step  
you don't want to take.

...

START CLOSE IN  
in River Flow  
New & Selected Poems  
Many Rivers Press © David Whyte

The path is not a straight line; it's a spiral. You continually come back to things you thought you understood  
...and...then...from your new perspective...see it differently...see deeper truths.

You are not spiraling out of control or spinning your wheels in a ditch.

You are revisiting old truths with a new perspective.  
Making peace again with the past so you can be in the present and move ever forward.

This is a spiritual practice as well as a practical life skill.

Moving beyond the situation ...far beyond Bethlehem  
...precisely because of Bethlehem...  
taking the path beyond.

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Wouldn't it be nice if we could go to the bookshelf and pull down a book, a recipe book of sorts, and find a recipe for...example:  
"How to help your best friend through their problem."

It might tell you exactly what to say, when to say it, then what to do next. "Bring Danish, add strong coffee, gather around kitchen table for 30 minutes."  
Something clear and exact.  
Or perhaps we could look up the recipe for  
"How to raise honest and helpful kids."

Or perhaps there would be a chapter on "How to tell your children or your parents about your hopes and dreams."

And I suspect we would all like the recipe for  
"How to say I'm sorry for hurting you."

And maybe we'd like a cookbook on religion, too...  
or would that be a road map...

one that would give us specific directions for  
how to live a joyful life....  
how to live in ways that fulfill God's deepest desires for us  
...how to get to heaven from Milwaukee!

You know....directions like:

Pray 4 times a day, say a kind word three times a day, add Bible study each week, and you will arrive!

But these kinds of directions are only half baked...  
would get you only half the way there!

...because they center completely on you...  
*On your interior life or thought world.*

Arriving in heaven...staying on the path to deepening truth,  
depends not only on your interior life....prayer and study or intentions....

but on your exterior life...what you do with what you know to do....and you do know  
what to do.

Actually, we do have recipes...in the "Joy of Living Cookbook", also known as the  
"Road Map to A Joy Filled Life"....the Bible.

The Bible is **not** a list of moral judgments....  
do's and don'ts...or else!  
It is **not** a list of answers.

It is not even a list of things you have to do  
to get to heaven. As if it is a final banquet/destination.

The Bible, instead, is the best advice human kind can offer, inspired by God, in  
order to live fulfilled lives right now so we don't have to wait till later to be in  
heaven.

**It's a book of better questions to be asking yourself  
every time you wish you had a road map to take you  
to the life you wished you had.**

And today's lesson is a gem of a map.....and although it's easy to read, it is not  
easy to follow.

Many of us have heard these lessons before.

And many of us actually follow them....the do unto others, give of yourself, don't get  
even....we actually follow these with the people.....*we love or like!*

But most of us "love" selectively and all of us know why:

because to love the unlovable, be fair to the unfair,  
forgive the unforgivable, do good to those who hate you....is really, really hard.  
*How hard is it?*

Almost impossible....that's why we simply don't hang out with people we don't like...with our enemies, with those who curse us, hate us, abuse us by taking advantage of us, who use us up.

We try to avoid these types to avoid the teaching.  
Hard teaching!

But try as we might to avoid these people or live lives that don't include such scenarios,  
we can't avoid challenging folks and circumstances.  
There is no way not to be pushed out of our comfort zones.

Jesus' teaching exactly! ..pushing us out of our comfort zones to be with exactly these people. He is saying we are to live in ways that don't avoid these people. We are to live in ways that actually include them...the Golden Rule.

Did you know that there is a similar "Golden Rule" teaching in other world religions...but it reads more like: "Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you"?

...sort of "don't bother or bully others" if you don't want such done to you.

It is similar, but vastly different.

Jesus is telling us  
"Do to others as you would have them do to you".

Do you hear the difference?

Jesus is saying stay alongside...far more than don't bother or don't get even....actively engage them and up set their ways.

The internal journey of faith pushes us out into the world to be a force for what is "right and just for all".

The spiritual and physical real world are connected.

Christians don't sit back and live good lives. We get up and out to live good lives!

We are to go into real life situations beyond our own lives and make a difference in people's lives....not only for the good of the world, but for our own good.

If you have ever been able to return unkindness with kindness, give away your last dollar to someone who needed it more than you, carried an unfair load....

then you know what happens within you is powerful and wonderful....a bit like heaven right here and right now....a piece of heaven in Milwaukee...more than a full measure is returned to you.

This is not saying become a doormat.

It is saying, take the high road...beyond an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. Put your head in your heart and think!

What does your road map look like?

Who is it that you see as your enemy...someone who just agitates you, rubs you the wrong way, sabotages you every time they can...at work, school, at home?

Who is it who hates you....you know...avoids you, looks at you with that evil eye?

Who is it who strikes you....for us, most likely with words that bite or tear down or bruise?

Who is it that keeps taking the coat from your back by taking advantage of you time and time again?

Jesus says the road map takes us  
right through these people.

Yet, it is almost impossible to put ourselves with people we don't like...with our enemies, with those who curse us, hate us, abuse us....

that is, if you're trying to do it on your own.

In fact, I don't think you can love in these ways on your own....

So...how do you get to heaven from Milwaukee?

Well, not alone for sure.

You have to hang out with those who are also on "the way"....seekers who can sustain your efforts and support your becoming a successful failure at life...

failing in the ways of the world –  
succeeding in the ways of heaven.

You already know what to do. God is calling you.  
You have the road map.

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In a little town there was a man who thought he had been mistreated in his life, even at church. So he withdrew himself from church and isolated himself by surrounding himself with sympathetic friends.

Weeks went by until, finally, one cold winter's day, the pastor called on him. After a polite greeting, there was a heavy silence. Then the pastor said, "Let's sit in front of the fire."

So the two sat in complete silence. An hour or so later the pastor picked up the fireplace tongs, pulled out a coal and placed it on the hearth, away from the fire. Still no word was spoken.

They sat and watched the glowing, burning piece of coal become darker and darker, until finally it was black and cold and dusty with ashes.

A few moment later, the man spoke, "I understand. I'll come back to church." Not a word had been spoken, but the point had been made:

We withdraw from the community,  
we isolate ourselves from neighbors,  
and our light goes out, we die.  
We need one another.

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May you reflect on the specifics of the road map God is offering you so you can get from wherever you are on the path to the peace of heaven...exactly where you are.

May you be able to read the signs along the way that are telling you exactly where you need to go and what you need to do.

And may you be wise enough to surround yourself with others who "get it"....which means you have to literally be where they are....and we are here!

Are you? Where are you? Will you come?  
Where are you going?

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You are no longer the person you were when you first discovered it...and as you journey,

Old truths revisited, revised.

Take a moment. Name that deeper truth you can now embrace. Write it down in your bulletin, in your heart.

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“You know you are on the right path when you start feeling peace in situations where you would normally feel tension.”

Ego says, “Once everything fall into place, I’ll feel peace. Spirit says, “Find your peace, and then everything will fall into place.”