

ROAD TRIP: WHERE ARE YOU HEADED?
#5 HOME
Hebrews 12:1-3: John 15:1-5

For the last few weeks I've been asking you the question, "*Where Are You Headed?*" Where you headed as a Christian? What does your journey of faith look like? In the New Testament, the apostle Paul thought a lot about those questions. Here's what he concluded about his own life.

"I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back." (Philippians 3:14 Msg)

"...I'm running hard for the finish line. I'm giving it everything I've got. No sloppy living for me! I'm staying alert and in top condition. I'm not going to get caught napping, telling everyone else all about it and then missing out myself."
 1Corinthians 9:26-27 (Msg)

That was the way Paul lived out his Christian life, and because of that when he got near the end of his, he was able to affirm this in Second Timothy 4:7-8:

⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. ⁸ And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing.

What's the prize? Paul calls it the "***crown of righteousness***" Paul is thinking here about the sports competitions of his day where the winner of a race received a laurel wreath. It was a great honor to win this, but obviously a laurel wreath would wither in time. The "***crown of righteousness***", that Paul talks about here, is an eternal one that never fades or spoils. It is to hear God's applause at the end of your earthly life and to hear his blessing, "***Well done, my good and faithful servant.***" (Mathew 25:21 NLT) And the wonderful thing about that prize is, that we don't win it by getting to the finish line first, because Jesus Christ, by his death and resurrection, has already won that prize for us. All we need to do to keep our eye on Jesus. Hebrews 12:2 (GNB). "***Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end.***"

Now sometimes it does help to have some markers along the way to help us on our journey of discipleship. So imagine baseball diamond.

There are four bases. Let's start at home plate as you come up to bat. Discipleship begins when you make a personal commitment of your life to Jesus Christ. John the Baptist signaled this call of the gospel. (Mark 1:4 GNB). **"Turn away from your sins and be baptized and God will forgive your sins."** So home plate is where we respond initially to the good news of Jesus, and where we take our first steps of faith. It's where we become *"Connected to God"*. It's where, somewhere between home and first base, that we formally identify ourselves with Jesus Christ by being baptized. Here's what Presbyterians believe about baptism. :

"Baptism is a sign and seal of our union with Christ and with his church. Through it we share in the death and resurrection of Christ and are commissioned to his service... the water signifies the washing away of sin, the start of new life in Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Living Faith 7.6)

So now we're on First Base. This is when we become *"Connected to the Church"* in baptism.

But being connected to the Church is much more than baptism. Listen to what Scripture says about the church of Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:22-23 **God has put all things under the authority of Christ ... And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.** The Church is the **"body of Christ"**. The church is a living organism, not a static institution. To be a member of the church means to be connected to Christ, as Saviour and Lord, in a very intimate way. Jesus said in John 15:5, **"I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing."**

We have to understand something about the early history of the Church. The first Christian congregations met in private homes, or in fields, or in the catacombs – the underground cemeteries – beneath major cities. No-one thought of the church as a building in the New Testament. To be part of the church was to be in a relationship with Jesus, and with his people. That's why Presbyterians confess to this day that:

*The church is Christ
together with his people*

*called both to worship and serve him
in all of life. (Living Faith 7:1)*

And because the "church" is about living relationships, Jesus said, Matthew 18:20, **"For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them."**

Home plate - "Connected to God."
First Base - "Connected to the Church".
Second base is - "Connected to Ministry."

Now I just asked you to rethink what the Church is. To see it not as a building but as "**Christ together with his people.**" So now you need to rethink what "ministry" is. The Presbyterian Church, based on what Scripture teaches, says that:

*The Lord continues his ministry
in and through the church.*

*All Christians are called
to participate in the ministry of Christ. (Living Faith 7.1)*

Did you get that? **"All"** Christians are called to participate in the ministry of Christ. Yes, Laura and I have a special function in the Church as we are set apart to be full time ministers of Word and Sacrament, but we are not the only ministers of the church. You are all ministers. Ephesians 4:11-12 (NLT) explains it this way, **"Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ."**

That explains the next thing Presbyterians believe about ministry.

*As his body on earth
we all have gifts to use
in the church and in the world
to the glory of Christ, our King and Head. (Living Faith 7.2)*

Now here's the really exciting thing. When you were born, God gave you some natural talents. Every human being has some of these. But when you became a Christian, God gave you some super-natural gifts intended for you to use in ministry. The New Testament calls these "*spiritual gifts*". Listen to First Corinthians 12:4-7, **"There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. ⁵ There are different ways of serving, but the same Lord is served. ⁶ There are different abilities to perform**

service, but the same God gives ability to all for their particular service. ⁷ The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all.

So I have three questions for you. Question #1, do you know what your spiritual gifts are? If not, ask me and I'll help you discover them. Question #2. Are you using them? Question #3. If not, why not? Please remember this. If you are not using your spiritual gifts, this congregation's ministry and your influence as a Christian is being impeded. Being a Christian is intended to be a participant, not a spectator sport.

Connected to God

Connected to the Church

Connected to Ministry

Third base is "*Connected to Missions.*" Read with me what Presbyterians believe about mission. (LF 9.1.1.)

*As God sent Christ to us,
so Christ sends us into the world.
We are here to proclaim Christ
in word and deed.*

Mission has two parts to it. First, it is *evangelism*, where we offer the good news of salvation to all people in the name of Jesus. Second, mission is also *service*, where we help people in need, and where we model the compassion of God. We need to see both of these things as two essential components in our walk of faith. This is how we make a difference in the world. This is what makes the church distinct from every other human organization.

There's a great story in Second Kings Chapter 7. The city of Samaria is under siege and the situation is desperate. So God intervenes, and causes the enemy to depart suddenly leaving everything behind. Four lepers – outcasts – come across the abandoned camp, which was filled with food and drink and treasure. As they enjoyed their discovery they suddenly thought of the desperate and dying people in the besieged city and they said to one another, verse 9, "***We have good news, and we shouldn't keep it to ourselves.***" Ha is, "*We need to go and tell the hungry, desperate, people in the city what we have found.*" The same thing should be said by us. Mission is the life blood that flows through the church. When you leave this building today you are entering your mission field. You have good news to share with others in word and action. Never forget that.

Connected to God
 Connected to the Church
 Connected to Ministry
 Connected to Mission.

And so we run from third base to home plate, where our journey of faith began. Home plate brings us back to where we started but now rather than us connecting with God personally, it is where we "*Connect People to God.*" Matthew 28:19-20 (NLT), "***Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.***"

Reproducing disciples is a sign that you have successfully run the bases.

So where are you headed? What base are you on right now? Are you heading for home? Then know this. The crown of righteousness is ready for you.

Pastoral Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
 King and Head of the Church:
 Thank you for inviting us to follow you
 as one of your disciples.

Thank you for welcoming us,
 into your body, the church.
 Thank you for those sitting around us today,
 our brothers and sisters in Christ.
 Thank you for the ministry and the mission
 You have called us to.

Bless our congregation we pray,
 as we serve in our community.
 May we always be a light shining for Jesus!

Bless our ministries,
 especially those that feed the hungry,
 befriend the lonely,
 and offer mercy and compassion to the weary.

Thank you for the opportunities we have to support the wider work of
 the church at home and overseas:

through Presbyterians Sharing;
Presbyterian World Service and Development;
The Canadian Food Grains Bank;
and ministries such as Inn from the Cold, Boarding Homes and the
Food Pantry.

Remind us always to act as the body of Christ in our world today.

We pray specifically today in grateful thanks for a reduction in tension
between North Korea and the United States and we continue to pray for
wisdom for the leaders of both nations.

We pray for the families of the over 300 mudslide victims in Sierra
Leone, the 11 victims of the tree that fell on the crowd on the Portuguese
island in Madeira, and for those still recovering from the car attack
during the protests in Charlottesville, Virginia.

God, remind us always that You are our hope, in this life and in the next,
through Christ our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.