

Sermon June 7, 2009  
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(The first few sentences of this sermon were not recorded.) Maps don't always represent reality; they represent the reality we want, or the reality we see. A couple years later when I graduated from Div(inity) School, Frank gave me a gift. It was a very big box, and it was very light. So I was curious to open it. Guess what it was. A globe! It was the world. He had handed me the world, so I opened it up, and there's this beautiful globe,--still in my library at home. Interesting thing though...about three months later, the Soviet Union came apart politically. So my globe was out of date, three months after I got it. Do you have a globe at home? Or a map at home that's completely out of date? Now we go on the Internet, don't we?

So I've been sometimes struggling here in Portland, to find my way around--especially when I was new. So I first got the book...driving around with the book...and then my eyes went bad. I couldn't see the book anymore. So I got reading glasses...driving and looking. Then I got tired of the map being wrong, so I got one of those electronic GPS systems, that's always right...until I went to see my friend, who was in a new house, in a new section of homes...and I got to a place where my GPS said there was no more road, and I was looking at a road in front of me.

Maps don't always tell the truth. And yet, each of us has a map. We have an inner map. I like to look back at maps, and I was sorry I missed a presentation in Portland this week about the history of maps. And if you look in the Age of Exploration...it's fascinating...I've talked about this before...this is my last Age of Exploration sermon this Spring. But I love that time, and I think it helps us spiritually to look at that time.

At the Age of Exploration, there were the big explorers that we all know. And then there were some that got lucky. They sort of bumped into places...the wind blew them...they discovered something...they went home and they settled back down. One of those types bumped into the northern coast of Brazil. And he came back, with his exploration. It wasn't until later when a mapmaker in Germany picked up his name, and decided that a continent needed to be named after a man. All the other continents were named after women, and we needed one for men, he thought. And so, in his mapmaking study, he wrote "The Americas." Amerigo Vespucci was this Italian explorer who bumped into Brazil. So the German mapmaker named America after this obscure explorer, and we take it naturally as our name. Someone in his study, making a decision... Now you say the name to Americans, and at certain times we can become weepy...waves of golden grain...we really have a sense of this country, and its name. And yet, the flighty way it was named is amazing. Mapmakers have always been the ones in their studies, focusing on the stories they hear of exploration, and then determining reality.

So I ask you on this Sunday--Trinity Sunday--are you a mapmaker, who sits safely in your study, determining reality that is out there somewhere? Or, are you an explorer? Are you that person of spiritual courage, who is going to go out, be blown by the wind, and bump into it? I believe that is what you are called to do. Go out into the world.

Make your map. Use a map, but don't be so wedded to it, that it becomes an idol...that it becomes false reality, that orders and determines things--even when they're wrong. You've heard of "Don't confuse me with the facts--my mind's made up." There's a way to do that spiritually, as well. And on Trinity Sunday, which is today, we are called to ponder this, because we celebrate today, the Trinity--our namesake. Most parishes are named after a saint. But we are named after **God**. And I think it gives us the occasion, at least once a year, to ponder our God, and the way we describe God as "Trinity."

Martin Smith, a thinker and a teacher in the Church, has talked about the Trinity, saying that--whatever else the Trinity tells us about God--the Trinity says that God is in relationship and conversation with God's self...that God has different parts that are in relationship with each other...and in fact, are in conversation. We hear that in Scripture. We hear Jesus--the son, talking to God--the Father. And we hear God responding--at Jesus' baptism, and at other times. We know that God is in conversation with God's self. In that way, God is always changing...always changing. You've heard that no person can dip their foot in the same river twice...because the river changes, and the person changes. You can never dip your toe in the same river twice. So it is with God, always changing--and yet eternal. Eternal, then, becomes a sense of fullness--not length. Eternal becomes a sense of maturity--living into, rather than longevity, and living out.

So on this Trinity Sunday, ponder your spiritual map. I promise you--if your spiritual map is more than twelve minutes old, it's out-of-date. And it's time to start working on a new map. When I was young, I used to ride bicycles--go on bicycle tours, alot. I loved it--a great way to travel when you're eighteen. And on my handlebar bag, there was a clear place. Under that clear place, I would slip the map. When I went out of range, we'd turn the map over, fold it back up, slip it in again. And when we were done with the trip, we threw that map away, and brought out a new map, when it was time for a new journey.

On this Sunday, the Scripture that we hear tells you it's time for a new journey, for each one of you--especially for Tristan, who is being baptized--and for our confirmands right here in the front row. It's time for a new journey. But so it is for each one of you. Let this liturgy of Confirmation and Baptism, be a call out to you. And when you worship, remember the words of Isaiah, and the experience Isaiah went through, in the Hebrew Scriptures. Do you notice how the Hebrew Scriptures in today's reading began with: "In the year King Uzziah died..." The map was over. In the time of Isaiah, the King was the State. And so, the King helped everyone know that they were OK. Imagine that each time we changed mayors here in Portland, that the whole city was in jeopardy of falling apart. That's how it happened then. And so in the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah is in deep confusion, because he knows the old way is over...that change is coming. That's when God calls him. That's when Isaiah is open to the messenger that comes. That's when Isaiah says "I can't do this!" And the angel comes, and purifies his lips, and he is called out. That's when Isaiah gets a new map, and starts heading out into the exploration of Life around him.

You are called to that same exploration. Tear up the map you have, whatever it is, even if you're halfway there. And open your heart to a new place. Because the one constant we have in this life is change. And even the God that we name ourselves after, shows us that we change, and that God changes. And that even if we're in the stream of Eternity with God, as we believe we are, we're not insulated from change. Our own King Uzziah will die. And we will start again. So anchor your life, and anchor your spiritual journey in these days, in the words of Jesus, who said to us: "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it. But you do not know where it comes from, or where it goes." So it is with everyone who is born of the spirit.