

**Sunday September 4,
Proper 18
Deuteronomy 30:15-20
Philemon 1-21
Luke 14:25-33
The Rev. Fanny Belanger**

Of all the dreadful things about driving in this area,
the beltway would easily come on top of my list.
I guess I don't have to get into many details to help you understand why:
Traffic for one,
signs everywhere, interchanges, restricted lanes,
exits on the left, on the right, or in the middle of the road (this was new to me!)
- People driving like crazy, rushing or just
lost.

Well, you get the picture and can probably relate to the experience.

Yet until recently, all of that was not the scariest thing to me about the beltway -
the scariest thing would be
to end up on the outer loop.

The inner loop, I could handle.
At least, I could figure where it was and the purpose of it:
this large circle around DC,
connecting the suburbs together and to the heart of the city.
But the outer loop?

Where was it anyway? Because I could not see it, I started to figure it was like another huge HOV
on the other side of the giant road

and that if, for some reason I entered without paying attention,
it would lead me straight to

Baltimore or New-York
or even worse: to a deserted state highway in Maryland where I would not even find a Seven Eleven.

Anyhow – More mysterious than our highways are certainly God's ways
since for whatever reason, this past week I found the Wikipedia page of the Beltway
where I learned that inner loop and outer loop were actually
exactly the same road.

It's just a matter of direction:

Drive clockwise, you're on the inner loop
Drive counter clockwise, you're on the outer loop.

Well, I wish I had known before.
Yet, it was nice to find out in sort of an aha moment that
interestingly
the outer loop I was so worried about,
was actually the one that brought me back home each time.

The one thing I was so scared about was the one thing that kept me safe all the way – literally.

And so Jesus does not ask us to hate our close ones personally,
Jesus wants us to stop being stuck on the inner loop,
Jesus asks us to take a ride on the outer loop, Jesus asks us to change directions and go
Counter clockwise
Counter the culture of the world

Because that's what our lives usually look like, right? We first love our parents and then our spouse
to end up loving our children and mostly
we try to end up
loving our own life. This is all too natural, of course.

Yet in the midst of it all, Jesus asks us to break free:
He asks us that the love we naturally have for our own life,
for our families and friends, instead of bringing us back to our own self
would drive us to the love of all humanity
and of all beings.

So that the love we have for our close ones does not become our comfort zone.

Toddlers and teenagers in all their young wisdom knows that just fine:
It's an elementary rule of psychology: Kids push their parents away
so they can find love and meaning and connection in this world.

Well, according to the Gospel, it's an elementary rule of spirituality
that we have to pass beyond the ones we would naturally been drawn too.
Oh, we don't have to do it in a dramatic way – we only know how painful young rebellion can be for
the rest of the family.

It has nothing to do with self-indulgence.

It's about letting go to embrace our own destiny,
take up our own cross, do the things God asks us to do.

It has nothing to do with extremism

Extremism would be: "Love your own, and hate the strangers".

But Jesus.

Jesus asks us to reverse the inner circle, and so we can ride on the outer loop of our hearts.

It's the exact same way, same road, it's the same love
than the one we have for our own

It's the same except that we're gonna go in the opposite direction: we bring to the world
the love we have been given in our own circle.

Today I set before you life and prosperity, death and adversity, did we read in Deuteronomy.

We don't have to figure out where is the second and invisible road, to find life
we just have to shift directions:

Bring love into the world instead of bringing love back to you.

It can be scary, indeed.

But that's the only way that keeps us safe and get us home because
home is not our own self, home is beyond ourselves, our true family.

As Paul writes it to Philemon, we may lose our close ones in the flesh, but we find them back in
Christ Jesus.

Home is the kingdom of God, and no other place.

Today's Gospel is often untitled in our Bibles

The Cost of Discipleship

And that's what Jesus seems to say, right?

Discipleship is going to cost you a lot. If you want to enter the kingdom of God, it's going to be hard.

You have to let go of your family, of your own life, of all your possessions.

So if you really want to do that, you need to think that over.

Like a builder laying foundations for a new tower or a king going to war.

Yet, if you think about it

the disciple is actually very different

than the king or the tower builder.

When these guys must make sure they have enough

the disciples must make sure they have nothing

No family, no possessions, no accomplishments – just the cross.

What is it you can get in this world with no relation, no hard work and no money?

Nothing.

Well, on the other way around, if you want to enter the kingdom of God, you must make sure you have nothing.

When I was a student there was a very big strike in France,

Train drivers.

As the strike went on and on for weeks, the people from the unions started replacing trains with buses so travelers would not get completely stuck.

And I remember, as I was heading back home I got on a bus, and as I presented my rider card the driver took it and instead of charging it

He tore it down.

He tore it down and said: "What's the point of having a strike, if the company does not lose money?"

The driver wanted to be sure I had nothing before hopping on the bus.

Our ticket to heaven is just torn down at the entrance of the kingdom.

We have to get rid of all money, relationships, accomplishments

Not to give them away in some kind of sacrifice

but because we need to be aware it's worth nothing

Not because it is valueless

but because the cost of discipleship is zero.

The cost of discipleship is zero. The logic of the kingdom of God circles counter clockwise to all our human logic.

We don't have to own a thing or to be a thing

or even to have a single person in the world who likes us.

In the shade – or more likely – in the light of the cross,

We are already loved and accepted.

And I think this is really what can free us from having relationships looping in an inner circle, because what keeps us inside the circle is often our fear of being rejected.

We want to belong and to fit in.

Well, Jesus tells us we can let go of our need to be loved back, acknowledged and approved,

Because we are loved and accepted.

We just have to learn from him this way to love for nothing. Amen.