

Grove Presbyterian Church 16 May, 2010

You are about to hear the first reference to the first name of the new Christian movement.

Saul, soon to be named Paul, carries orders to arrest Christians. But they aren't called Christians yet. They are the Jews who belong to the Way, the way of the new Judaism Jesus is.

A poetic description. Parabolic even. Five times used in Acts as description of Christians.

Acts 9:2
19:9, 23
22:4
24: 14

Probably comes from Jesus himself, when in that popular passage in John 14 he describes himself, saying, "I am the way...."

Things happen on the road. As Saul is about to discover.

What road trips have you taken where things have happened to change you?

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

9,422.1 miles. That's a whole lot of miles to think about driving. That's how much I covered in a month and a day. Both in Los Angeles traffic jams and driving up along the Mississippi in Louisiana. Both rocky paths in Monument Valley and along the Pacific Coast Highway north to Big Sur. Across a variety of bridges. Interstates and back roads. Both two lane roads 8,000 miles high and the road at Death Valley 41 feet below sea level. Both driving at 80 MPH and 15 MPH. Both downhill switchbacks or a ribbon of a road straight as an arrow for miles.

9,422. 1 miles. That's also lots of time to think. Solitude time to think is a good thing. Too often we are surrounded by too much talk, too much noise. Most of the time I didn't even turn on the radio or play the iPod. Time to think.

9,422.1 miles. Thinking about where I've been and where I'm going. What's ahead. What's behind. Discovering the way. Discovering new things about me.

Roadways, highways, bi-ways, and the way of life. It applies whether it is how you drive your car or drive your life.

So we offer a few Bible driving tips. And their spiritual equivalents.

Sure it's corny. Maybe you can come up with some of your corny own.

Driving Tip:

First things first: when behind the wheel, focus on the road. And that includes everything around you. Ahead, sideways, and behind. That's what's those mirrors are for. You look ahead and you look behind. Remember: you drive safe and smart not only for your sake but for the sake of everyone else traveling. There's a good reason there's regulations discouraging use of cell phone, putting on eye makeup, or texting while driving. We don't need any more crosses on the shoulder of the road marking a bad accident from someone not paying attention.

Spiritual message:

Even if in cruise control, better keep your eye on the road. Stay the way. Mostly look ahead but remember to look back and see what's behind you. Look around to be sure to notice those around you. Especially: avoid those worldly distractions that can drive you quickly off the road, crashing off from Jesus.

Driving Tip:

Replace those bald tires. It is scary spinning 360. Done it before. Worse when the roadway is icy or wet. No tread equals no traction. Suppose you're going faster than you think. You take the curve and, whoops...whirl, smash, crash. Did it one day with my old station wagon with all the kids in it. You've hurt others and yourself.

Spiritual message:

Are your moral tires bald or do you have good tread, deep grooves? Moral traction protects you and those you love from spinning out of control. Gripping the roadway. All the more when the weather isn't fair to keep you adhering to the right way.

Driving Tip:

Road rage. Why do some get red faced? Are others getting in the way of what they want? Why are they so defensive? Are others impeding from them their expectations?

Spiritual message:

Attitude is everything. When folks start giving the Jersey gesture or turning puffed up red-faced, don't retaliate: they who retaliate are they who get caught. Get away from angry people. Anger and resentment will turn a nice drive nasty and spoil the trip.

Driving Tip:

Fuel up

Spiritual message:

How do you replenish yourself? How do you nourish yourself? Fuel up: prayer, Bible study, conversation with others about God, regular worship – if you forget to fuel up you will run on empty and get stuck on the shoulder hoping for help. Guaranteed. And by the way, fill up on the right fuel. High octane.

Driving Tip:

The orange construction sign gives advance warning: left lane closed – ½ mile ahead.

Spiritual message:

It is a real simple solution to keep traffic flowing: alternate. Take turns. Makes it real simple for everyone to be able to keep going forward. Pushing yourself ahead of others, forcing yourself ahead, as if you're the most important driver, that's when the traffic gets all jammed up.

Driving Tip:

There is a reason Penn Dot posts signs along the road: bridge ices up, slow down on exit ramp – trucks entering – deer crossing – stoplights ahead. If you pay attention to the signs, you can keep traveling – safely and accurately -- where you want to go.

Spiritual message:

Pay attention to all spiritual and emotional signs. There are those negative signs: discomfort, apprehension. Pay attention to them. They're telling you something. Pay attention to the positive signs also, those hidden voices, those nudges of the spirit urging you to, say, make that visit, send that card.

Driving Tip:

Clean your windshields. Clean them at every gas station – grab that squeegee –for windshields smeared and smudged from all the bug splatter can be a bother, especially when you're driving into the sun. Those kamikaze bugs turn even sunlight into a hindrance. It's even worse at night because bugs come out in a vengeance in the night, drawn to the headlamps.

Spiritual message:

Squeegee away those smudged souls. Clean up the dirty mind. Wipe up the mistakes of the past. Clean up how you look at others. See them as Jesus sees them rather than through your judgmental eyes. Only then you can see clearly the way forward.

Driving Tip:

'If you can't see my mirrors, I can't see you.' Avoid following too closely the truck or car in front of you. Give distance. Tailgating does not give you space to escape. They ahead jam on their brakes, hit yours – too close and it's a pile-up.

Spiritual message:

When you follow someone else too closely, even if a splendid Christian, you're letting them dictate how you drive. You got to make the journey your own. You got to make how you drive the highway of God your own.

Driving Tip:

Detour ahead.

Spiritual message:

Count on them. Detours will happen. Nothing is perfect. Never met a road that didn't have a few detours along the way. So, might as well profit from them. Sometimes it is the detours in life that can be the more interesting. Whoever thought Jesus would take you on a straight run?

Driving Tip:

Obey speed limits. If you go the speed limit, why worry? You see the police cruiser on the side of the road. Others start slamming their brakes, speeding past, nervously checking the rear view mirror to see if they've been caught. Oh no, he's pulling out. Oh no, a ticket, points, and fine. Fines doubled in construction zones.

Spiritual message:

There are few feelings better than knowing you're okay. I'm just fine. Whether driving through the small town in Alabama or the Arizona interstate. Why? You're driving the speed limit. I'm just fine. Besides, why hurry? Let the road come to you. You smile as you pass by the highway patrol or the local cruiser. When you follow the rules you won't have to worry about getting caught.

Driving Tip:

No matter where you may be driving or how fast you may be going, someone always will drive faster and will pass you.

Spiritual message:

So what's it to you? Just take care of your driving. You can't control or regulate how others are traveling.

Driving Tip:

It happens every now and then when you drive a stick shift, especially if you're either new at it or plain tired from long miles. You miss the gear. You press down on the clutch but miss the shift. The car revs down, caught in neutral.

Spiritual message:

Even if you have to go slow -- first gear, second gear, third gear -- at least you're going in the right direction. For one thing is certain: slipping your transmission into neutral, shifting out of gear from the power of faith, gets you nowhere. Get in gear, friends.

Driving Tip:

You see them ahead. Drivers who remain the left lane, even when the right lane is empty. Very annoying. They don't budge. They drive along oblivious to everyone else. Or are they? Or are they really trying to control the flow of traffic, giving them reason to scoff in disgust at frustrated folks behind them are forced to pass them on the right.

Spiritual message:

Here's one for congregations filled with folks unwilling to accept change. Hey: its right lane for traffic flow. Left lane for passing. Who are you to impede others from progressing on their way? Get out of their way.

Driving Tip:

Last, you veer onto the entrance ramp and you're merging onto the busy interstate. Why do some think it is their right to go as fast as they can, and everyone else, already on the

road, should make room for them. Please avoid aggressive merging. See that sign ahead? It says 'Yield.' They don't have to adjust to you. You have to adjust to them, to the flow of traffic on your left.

Spiritual message:

Friends: you cannot force yourself onto God's highway on your terms; The road isn't a right, it is a gift. It is up to you to yield.

Whether 9,422.1 miles or 94 years. It's all a road trip.

And Jesus said, "I am the way...."

For Christianity is neither a place to stay nor a destination. It is the great way to go.

Bon voyage, safe journey, traveling mercies.