

markers. I've heard stories of past youth mission trips before my tenure that have helped the person grow as a Christian. I've worked alongside great adult leaders who help create memories that will last a lifetime. I know Karen and Melanie have also worked alongside many of you who have helped to make lasting memories with our children. When we offer our time and energy and we walk alongside our children and youth, we help them make memories that will anchor their faith. We help them to experience their own spiritual mile makers that they can point back to and remember God's goodness and faithfulness.

Not only do we need to remember our own markers and help our children and youth create their own, we need to serve as a Scriptural guide and companion. As we walk alongside them, we must remind them of scripture and help them make connections they would miss otherwise.

When the Dead Sea Scrolls were on display at the NC Museum of Natural Sciences a couple of years ago, we took some of our students to view the artifacts. If the students had gone to the museum and read all of the descriptions and history that were displayed, they would have learned a great deal. However, we were given the headphones that led us through the audio tour that taught us more than we would've learned on our own. Even more than that, if we would've had an Old Testament scholar who had been studying the scrolls leading us through the exhibit, we would've learned even more than we learned from the audio tour. The live person would've been able to tell us stories of the exhibit that would've made a lasting impact on us.

In the same way, our children and youth learn from what they read in the Bible and what they experience in life. They learn even more when they are taught in Sunday School, VBS and through other avenues by adults who care about their spiritual growth. However, they learn the most when they have parents and mentors in their lives who utilize

the biblical teaching moments that arise as they live life together.

As adults, we are instructed to walk alongside our children and youth and be a scriptural guide and companion. We can't expect to simply drop in and give guidance only when our children and youth mess up and then disappear once again. We must be willing to walk alongside them through the messiness of life, pointing them away from the landmines of our culture and redirecting them to the cross of Christ.

At the end, it's about God's story. It's all about God. In his infinite mercy, he has allowed us to be a part of his story. He wasn't content in leaving us in our sin leading to death but gave us life everlasting through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Christ rescued us from eternity of suffering and ushered us into the Kingdom of Light.

Paul describes this unimaginable story to be God's alone and how deeply unearned our part in any of it must be in Romans 11:33-36.

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

"Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?"

"Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?"

For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Because we had NOTHING to do with God creating a way for us to salvation, Paul told the Romans, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship."

We did nothing to deserve the part we have in God's story. But now that we are a part of God's story, we are to bring others into his story by sharing our stories, our mile markers, in order for all to know of God's goodness and faithfulness for generations to come. It is through my story and our stories together we can help bring others into God's story.



# The Trinity Pulpit

## Mile Markers Deuteronomy 5:6-21; 6:4-9

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I didn't grow up taking a lot of road trips as a family. We didn't take a lot of vacations since my dad and stepmother had to work so much to keep our family business going. But in the summer of 1982, we took two different road trips that I distinctly remember. My grandparents had come from Korea to visit that summer, so my dad made the extra effort to take some time away from the business. We made a trip to Disney World in Orlando and also made our way to Knoxville, TN for the World's Fair.

I don't remember many details of the trips other than it was hot and crowded in both places. I don't remember a lot about our time at Disney World except we must of spent an awful lot of time at Magic Kingdom, because the only lasting memory is a song etched in my memory... "It's a small world after all."

I have even less recollection of the World's Fair. The only memory I have is the giant silver ball in the center of the fair. There was a lot of stuff I wasn't interested in, since I was only 8 years old.

What I do remember are the car rides to and from the venues. My dad drove a 1981 blue Chevy Malibu station wagon. My brothers and I later referred to it as the "Dragon Wagon." Since it was before the days of seat belt laws, my dad and step mother were in the front, my grandparents in the back seat and my brother, step brother and I were sprawled out in the back of the station wagon. I remember being hot, cramped and just uncomfortable to say the least. Let's not for-

get that we didn't have one of the luggage carrying "chicken nugget" containers on top of the car. All of the luggage was also in the back with the three boys age 10, 9 and 8. Furthermore, my grandparents had not acclimated themselves to American food, thus, we were also transporting packed food in a large cooler with the sweet aroma of Korean food. (Lots of sarcasm here!)

As you can imagine, everyone was ready to get there the moment we left the house! I can remember just looking out the window and watching the signs go by. I was too young to realize what the mile markers meant, but I watched them whiz by as we made our way down I-40 and I-95.

However, as I fondly reflect back on these two trips, they serve as mile markers in my life. It was the only time I was able to spend time with my grandfather in the United States before his passing a few years later.

Just as signs alongside our interstates serve as markers of our progress to our destination, so do the significant events of our lives toward spiritual growth. Right or wrong, our culture has helped to define some of the "rites of passages" our children go through. Though there are too many to list them all, some of the significant moments in the lives of our children and adolescents are kindergarten graduation and entering into grade school. Children rise through the ranks of elementary school and become the big kids on campus by 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Then everything changes, including their bodies as they enter into middle school. The young adolescents stumble through middle school only to find themselves back on the bottom of the totem pole as a freshman in high school.



Then comes the driver's license at the age of 16, followed by graduation and college. These are significant moments our culture has defined for our society and worth celebrating in the lives of our children.

However, our culture cannot define our significant spiritual mile markers for us. The spiritual mile markers don't occur at specific times due to chronology. It has to be much more intentional than that. Today's text, one that is familiar to all of us, tells us that as parents, grandparents and mentors, we're to not only impress the Great Commandment onto our hearts but to consistently share them with our children.

The Israelites, after 40 years of wandering around the desert and experiencing all of the ups and downs of their journey, were about to enter into the Promise Land. In the previous chapter, Moses reminded the next generation of Israelites of the Ten Commandments that was first shared with their parents and grandparents at Mount Horeb. (Deuteronomy 5:6-21) Then in Deut. 6:4-9, Moses encapsulated the Ten Commandments into what Jesus refers to the Greatest Commandment, "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all your strength." We are to love our God with every fiber of our being.

We are to love our God with our heart. To the Israelites, the heart did not refer to a sense of feeling or emotion, as it does for us today. The heart was a storage place for knowledge, equivalent to the mind of today. We are to love the Lord with our soul. This refers to our being or who we are inside. It is our character. Finally, we are to love our God with our strength. We are to love God with our labor and our service. Our actions should reflect our love for our Maker.

As we live out the Shema and/or Great Commandment, we are also charged to share it with our younger generations. We are to teach all of the commandments to our children, individually and corporately. I believe it is a specific charge to parents. It is the responsibility of Christian parents to teach their children the commands of the Lord in its entirety. In addition, I also believe that the charge also applies to the corporate body of believers. It's up to all of us to share the Lord's commands with the younger generations. We're to consistently remind our children and youth the good works of the Lord and the ultimate grace that was

offered to us on the cross. It is the role of the church to support and reinforce the Christian teachings that are being taught in the homes and to be a body of support for the family.

Just a few weeks ago, Dr. Roberts spoke directly to parents using this passage. Though he spoke directly to parents on that day, I believe his emphasis can be shared by all adults in body of faith. Whether we are parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters or mentors, we play a part in the spiritual growth of our children and youth.

Dr. Roberts pointed out that every moment is a teaching moment, helping our children to grow in their faith as we live life together. In order for faith to be shared with the younger generation, the adults surrounding them must demonstrate an authentic faith. Finally, he pointed out that it wasn't about finding success as parents and mentors but our role is to be faithful. Free will allows each child to accept the faith that is being shared and handed down, but it also allows them to reject it. We don't have control over that. All we can do as mature believers is to be faithful in our efforts to pass on our faith to the next generations.

So how are we to do this? How are we to share our faith with the younger generations? I believe it happens through stories. It happens through sharing those special mile markers or stones as our new Student Ministry Associate, Lydia Tatum, referred to last week. It happens when we walk alongside our young, spending time with them, sharing life together and telling them about God's faithfulness and grace over and over again.

Before we can share these special spiritual mile markers with the young, we must take time to remember our own mile markers. Remember back to those moments when God was so real in your life that it propelled you forward in your spiritual journey. Think about how God worked during those times and what kind of impact it had on your life.

I remember some of the spiritual mile markers I've had in my life. I remember my first retreat with my youth group as a 7<sup>th</sup> grader. This was my first experience of going to Fort Caswell. For those of you who have not been to Caswell, it is a beautiful place on the beaches of Oak Island.

The entire retreat center went through a major renovation in the late '80's and early '90's. However, my first experience of Caswell was before the renovations began. I still remember that first night as if it was yesterday. I remember entering into the cottage where we were to stay and flipping on the lights to the bunk room. The enormous cockroaches that inhabited the room stared at me and the others as if we were barging into their home. They simply stared at us, until we scattered out of the cottage! That is my first memory of Caswell.

The experience with the cockroaches was not the reason why the retreat was a spiritual mile marker in my life. I remember several of the older high school guys taking an interest in this new 7<sup>th</sup> grader on his first retreat. They let me sit in the back of the van with them and I remember the friendships I made on that retreat, making a lasting impact on my spiritual growth.

I remember my first mission trip that I ever went on. We suffered for Jesus on Hilton Head Island for a week, working with children at a local church's day camp. I remember the long days of teaching Bible stories, making crafts, playing games and singing songs. I remember looking forward to movie time so that I could catch a quick nap. I remember the 2-3 hour long devotions in the evening led by my youth minister where we shared about our day and how God moved throughout the day. I remember shedding many tears as I said good-bye to the kids that I had poured myself into for just a few days. That mission trip helped me to grow in my faith journey as I learned to give of myself to others.

In another spiritual mile marker, I think back to my junior year in high school. I remember my first sermon I gave on Youth Sunday. I remember the sermon being on forgiveness and sharing a true story of a classmate being shot to death. I recall his mother going to the county jail to share her love and forgiveness with the perpetrator, another fellow classmate. I remember trying to share that story while fighting through the tears that were streaming down my face. Not only was it a wonderful story of forgiveness but at that moment in time, I believe I experienced a cleansing from Jesus that I needed at that point in my personal life.

All of these moments are mile makers that have helped me to step forward in my faith journey. So I ask you, what are your spiritual mile markers? What do they signify? Who were you with and how did they make an impact on your faith journey? I hope you'll take some time today and in the coming days to remember your mile markers.

Deuteronomy 6:7-9 says, "Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." It can be paraphrased this way: "As you live life together, share your stories of faith with them over and over again." So the next time you tell the same story for the billionth time, be reminded that you are simply doing what the Scripture tells all of us to do! We must share our spiritual mile markers with the younger generations.

We all enjoy a good story. That is why the entertainment business will never really falter. Movies tell stories. Books tell stories. Songs tell stories. Sports tell stories. Stories are woven in the fabric of our lives. We all enjoy hearing stories because it makes an impact on our lives. We enjoy being around good storytellers who can paint a vivid picture with their words. We remember stories while forgetting the lectures we have heard.

As we tell stories to the younger generation, we share not only what happened at that moment in time, but we share how they fit into the greater realm of God's story. When you tell the story, share how God was at work and how it helped you to grow in your walk with God. These stories will be remembered for a long time and they will help to encourage the generations that come behind you. The stories of God's faithfulness, God's grace, God's love, and God's protection will strengthen their faith.

In addition to sharing the stories of your own spiritual mile markers, help others to experience their own markers. As adults, we need to help our children and youth to experience their own stories.

Trinity has always been a community of faith that believed in creating these spiritual mile