

Omleiding, Deviation, Detour

Acts 16:9-15

John 5:1-9

“You can’t get there from here”. That was an old saying that I heard growing up. It seemed like lots of roads in the Ozarks were either closed, under construction or repair, or occasionally washed out. AND, sometimes, it was simply a statement of fact...it might not be that far away on a map, but there was no realistic way to get from where you were to where you wanted to go.

Luckily, things have changed since then. With the advent of the GPS, there’s no longer that sort of problem, right?

Well, maybe.

In the recent past, a young couple in Spain were found, in their car, 20 meters off the edge of the beach, buried in wet sand up to the bottom of the car windows and the tide was coming in. When they were rescued, they offered a rather “unique” explanation: They were just going where the gps TOLD them to go. They didn’t really see a road, but it HAD to be there...right?

Or, how about the young man who “almost” drove his car off a cliff? The gps marked the road as continuous, however Mother Nature had a different idea and has washed out the bridge the week before. Yes, the highway department had put up a barrier, but the driver saw that the gps SHOWED the road continuing so he drove around the barrier and continued on, only stopping meters before driving off the now non-existent bridge.

All-in-all, over 400 reported accidents happen every year due to people following the directions of their gps without question.

It was only this last week, while trying to go from one location to another here in Brussels that I entered the two locations into the gps and received a notice that it was impossible to reach the location I had chosen! That shocked me, until I realized that I had it set on “walking” not “auto” and it was indeed impossible to get there on foot. (or at least not safe!)

All of that got me to thinking about detours.

You know what I am talking about...all those lovely signs we find scattered all about Brussels making a short drive into an endurance contest. And, of course,

even though the signs ARE put up, they are not always easy to find or follow. Sometimes, you'll find a sign turning you onto a new road, but you'll be hard pressed to find any other marking along the way!

Still...not all detours are bad. In fact, Sue and I have had some of the most delightful experiences, due to detours.

Years ago, I commuted to church on a motorcycle, and we would occasionally go for rides in the country. Getting out of the city and riding along the Mississippi River could be a beautiful way to spend a lazy afternoon!

One particular ride comes to mind, on a long, lazy day, riding along the river road, enjoying the colored leaves and having a nice. We were redirected a bit away from our planned route and found ourselves on a rather minor road in the middle of nowhere. We were hungry and we finally came upon a rather questionable little place and decided to give it a try.

We accidentally stumbled upon one of the absolutely BEST fried catfish shops in the country! I'm not sure if I could ever find it again, but that detour and that decision was the highlight of the day!

Detours sometimes work out that way.

When I graduated from High School, I was headed to a school called MIT to study engineering. I had always been good in math and science and it seemed a natural. I had received a pretty decent scholarship, so everything was in order.

Except, that summer, after graduation, 3 friends and I decided to ride 2700 miles from Kansas City, MO to Canada and back. Somewhere along that ride, I decided I didn't know WHAT I was going to do, or where, but it wasn't studying engineering at MIT. Once I got home, I sent them a letter declining the scholarship and tried to figure out what was next.

Next day, I receive a letter from Culver-Stockton College. It sounded interesting, so the next day I drove the 5+ hours it took to get to the school, looked around, went to the registrar and told her I wanted to enroll. (That's NOT the way it's done, by the way!)

Anyway, I got enrolled, drove home, told my parents, who were a “bit” shocked, and entered school as a freshman music, drama, speech, debate, technical theatre major. In other words, “undecided”.

Like many young students, I was NOT well-off financially. My parents did what they could, but money was tight and any extra money I could earn made up a tank of gas to get home, a bit of food money, that sort of thing.

In the spring of my freshman year, a gentleman representing the district church of the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, stopped by our speech and debate class, trying to recruit student who would be interested in being available to fill local pulpits when needed. He figured people who competed in Speech and Debate would be naturals. And, better yet, the going rate was \$50 a Sunday! SIGN ME UP!

Little did I know that the “occasional” Sunday would lead me to a tiny rural congregation in Gorin, MO. Which would lead me to preach there a couple of times in a row. Which would lead the congregation to invite me to become their pastor for the time I remained at college! So, 1 month from the end of my freshman year in university, I become the “regular preacher and student pastor” of the Gorin Christian Church.

That was SOME detour! However, personally, I think God sometimes puts detours in our lives both to get our attention AND to get us where we are needed. It seems to happen all the time.

Michael Billester visited a small town in Poland in the late 1930’s, shortly before WW II began. He met a man in the village and gave him a single Bible. The man read it and was converted to faith in Christ. He then passed the Bible on to others who were also converted, until two hundred people had become believers through that one Bible.

When Billester returned to the little town in 1940, this group of Christians met together for a worship service in which he was to preach the Word. He thought of asking them to give testimonies, but this time he suggested that several in the audience recite verses of Scripture. One man stood and asked, “Perhaps we have misunderstood. Did you mean verses or chapters?”

These villagers had not memorized a few select verses of the Bible but whole chapters and books. Thirteen people know Mathew, Luke and half of Genesis.

Another person had committed to memory the Psalms. That single copy of the Bible given by Billester had sunk deeply into the community and the hearts of those who received it. The surprising results of that one small Bible had born fruit of hundreds of lives changed.

With all of the surprises and big events recorded in Acts, it seems strange that we find this story of Lydia recorded here. However, it's worth noting that her story begins with a detour:

Paul has a vision that a man from Macedonia is pleading for his help. When he arrives, he finds not a man, but a group of women who listen to his teachings.

(This was surprising, given the times and culture, but not surprising in the context of the rest of Luke and Acts.... where women are honored and elevated in faith! Take that uber-conservatives!)

When Lydia opens her heart to receive the words about Jesus and become a follower of Christ, we learn that her own life will take a major detour as well. She and her entire household are baptized, and a new spark is ignited in Macedonia that will spread into a blaze.

Why, in a book of big miracles and major events, do we find the story of one woman coming to faith? Why bother to give her story top billing here among dramatic and stunning events?

Because God has always worked to change the world one life at a time. Lydia, just like the rest of us, has a choice of whether to listen and follow when she hears God's Word for the first time. And she DOES open her heart and then her home to the message of the Gospel. Who knows what will happen in her town because of her?

You, too, face choices all the time. Where to work, where to live, with whom to spend your time, what rules, guidelines or ethics determine your decisions.

Sometimes, the most obvious route takes a detour...going where you least expect it.

To Brussels, for instance,
OR to Savannah, MO.

However, my friends, I will tell you the detour is the right road, as long as God is directing the trip.