

Romans 8:1-6
“Walk This Way”

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In the 1974 Mel Brooks comedy, *Young Frankenstein*, Gene Wilder is waiting at the train station in the heavy fog. Igor, draped in a dark cloak, played by Marty Feldman, meets him there to take him to the castle. As they are leaving, Igor directs him, “Walk this way” and then limps sideways, using a cane, down the steps. Wilder follows with his normal walk, and Igor stops him: “No, *this* way,” handing him the cane. This old gag draws attention not only to the direction but his *manner* of walking.

Most of the time, you and I don’t even *think* about how we’re walking through life. We just go. If we are fortunate to have two working limbs, we take our walking for granted, and if we have the freedom and resources to go where we please for the most part, we don’t pay much attention to *how* we’re getting there. This ‘sleepwalking’ is a privilege that we have come to expect. Some white Americans, for example, depending upon our social location, don’t even think about how we’re walking through life, when others are not that unhindered.

In fact, I think that *all of us*, no matter our color or cultural heritage, particularly in *this* nation, try to set up our lives so we don’t *have* to think about the details. We want our banking to be systematized, to be able to count on food and transportation, and to retire at the lifestyle to which we have become accustomed. As much as possible, (do you agree?), we want to get things on autopilot. So that they will go like clockwork: smooth, fast, efficient, and productive, hoping to avoid surprises, trouble, arguments, and health crises.

The changes that we at RCC have been forced to make to go to online worship, for instance, has revealed to me just how much I depended upon the *old* order of service, how much I took for granted about being in front of actual people for preaching, and how used I had become to walking from the aisle to the pew, to the pulpit, to the communion table, and then into the fellowship hall.

We set up systems within the church and other realms *not* to have to think too much about how we are walking and what we are doing! We are thereby really setting our own self- interest and survival as top priority. The image of John Travolta’s famous walk in *Saturday Night Fever* comes to mind, as the BeeGees sing in the background, “Staying alive; staying alive!” And then I think of another icon – Frank Sinatra belting out, with a little rebelliousness, “I did it *my* way.”

Catering to these impulses is what the Apostle Paul means by “setting our minds on the flesh.” When he uses “flesh,” he’s not talking negatively about the human body, but about our unthinking preoccupation with our own survival: “me first, front and center, at all cost.” You see, in Romans, Paul lays out a major theological argument that God sent Jesus Christ to finally free us from our captivity to sin, death, and the “flesh.” Through *his* death and resurrection, Christ has liberated us and allowed us to walk according to the Spirit instead – his Spirit.

Raised as a Jew, Paul understood the concept of a person's "walk" as conduct – both the direction *and* the manner of one's life. Jesus wants us to walk *this* way. **This means not on autopilot, but mindfully. The scripture says to "set our minds on" Christ's Spirit as we walk.**

This week I revisited the story of Ruby Bridges, civil rights activist, who was the brave six-year old who walked into the William Frantz School in Louisiana upon desegregation in 1960. The stress of being the first was enormous: U.S. Marshalls and her mother escorted her in, school administrators and a willing teacher were with her everyday by herself, not just the first day, but that year! All of these allies still could not control the vicious, racist slurs and deeds against her and her family on the part of the parents and the town. The motto of Bridges' foundation says: "Racism is a grown-up disease, and we must stop using our children to spread it." At one point, her mother advised her to pray before walking into school and she remembers that it helped. She was setting her mind on the Spirit in order to walk this way.

To walk this way, *I* surely need to weave prayer through the day; as I wake and take my medicine, exercise, and get ready – to intentionally include the Spirit in prayer. I must journal regularly – a practice that I have put on hold to my detriment. It is also incumbent upon me to remember Jesus as I face the difficult parts of ministry, especially to journey through the COVID closure and to go deeper into racial justice, while these don't nearly compare to the pain he bore for us!; and then to end each day with gratitude.

To walk this way, churches and protestors need to set their minds on the Spirit – to pay attention to the divine inspiration that brought them out and sees them through; to step with intentionality and ask God for the wisdom to act against racism and violence in line with God's highest goals of love and peace with justice.

Let *us* set our minds on the Spirit and walk *this* way!