

Hitting the road: Sunday, June 3 (1 Corinthians 12:4-13; Acts 2:1-11)

## **You can't micromanage a road trip. The wind blows where it wills.**

by [Suzanne Guthrie](#) in the [May 16, 2001](#) issue

From the time I was a little girl I have loved international airports. In short segments of time you encounter diverse and colorfully costumed people from all over the earth arriving and dispersing throughout a web of corridors and platforms and waiting areas. You hear conversations in dozens of languages as people hurry toward their destinations. Travel makes me feel like a citizen of the world—the airport itself is like an orderly capital city, a reversal of Babel's chaos. In adulthood, I am still thrilled by the noise and crowds of passengers who are all, for one purpose or another, on the road.

For the Christian, the Feast of Pentecost marks the end of one journey and the beginning of another. The anointing of the Spirit confers upon the disciple a radical freedom to set out on new, open and uncharted roads. We've been preparing for this journey all of our lives in our Christian practice. The seasons of our life and the seasons of the church year have "equipped the saints" with prayer, compassion, courage, strength, humor and other fruits of the Holy Spirit. We have learned by heart the cycle of birth, manifestation, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. In our communities, we've been initiated, loved and trained in our "varieties of gifts." "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7). We've been packing, studying the maps and limbering up for the unitive life.

In Pentecost, we accept our maturity in faith. Where once we were initiated by baptism in water, we now acknowledge our baptism by fire. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we enter into the universal mission to go out to all nations witnessing and preaching the good news. No longer enslaved by sin and death, the disciple is equipped to challenge evil, sin and death through this initiation into the death and

resurrection of Jesus Christ and the anointing of the Holy Spirit. We are sent on the road with a love stronger than death.

A few notes about the freedom of the road ahead of us. You can't micromanage a road trip. You might think you are going one way, but the Spirit urges another. "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). This feature of obedience to the Spirit requires a certain kind of freedom from the nurturing community.

If Thomas, for example, had gone to India, what he encountered on the way would have required creative thinking in circumstances unimaginable and therefore not dictated or directed by the Jerusalem community. In the challenges of the moment you'd need the abilities of the wise scribe trained for the kingdom of heaven: "a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (Matt. 13:52). Those of us who are overly polite (even on a mission from God) should adopt a Christian version of *The Bad Girl's Guide to the Open Road*, in which Cameron Tuttle says, "If you're not sure how to begin, ask yourself what you'd love to do but don't ever allow yourself to do at home."

A road trip is transformation, not travelogue. The road will change you. Obstacles, adventures, vistas, encounters will occasion scars and brokenness, and summon insight and courage. Your discipleship becomes fully realized by the variables of the road itself and by your mission to carry and proclaim the good news into all circumstances. You will have to live "outside the box," as my daughter might say. According to an early legend, Mary Magdalene, *apostola apostolorum*, apostle to the apostles, became a traveler preaching to kings and emperors about the resurrection. The story is extraordinary—she was a "mere woman" outside conventional boundaries, not married, not owned, not sheltered. Yet she sailed port to port along the Mediterranean, and was guided by the Spirit alone.

Christian discipleship is the ultimate road trip. Of the disciples, all but John were martyred. Knowing you may die intensifies the mission. You risk, you love, you speak. How many of us, when facing death, have felt more fully alive than at other times in life? The radical freedom of the road unto death confers a freedom to truly live. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:24-25). On this road trip your death

sows new life in the Spirit. Tell what you know and what you have seen! The early Christian community was unified and strengthened by Peter's martyrdom, which brought them together to gather his bones and hide them from the Romans.

Even if the following legend isn't true, the story grants us courage. St. Peter is on the Appian Way, trying to escape arrest in Rome. On the road he encounters Jesus and is shocked at seeing the Risen Lord again. Peter asks, "*Domine quo vadis?*" (Lord, where are you going?). Jesus is said to have answered, "*Venio iterum crucifigi*" (I am returning to be crucified). Peter understands the rebuke and turns around to go back to Rome and his own impending crucifixion.

Dying, through thee they overcame; living, were faithful to thy name, says an ancient Latin hymn. May the Holy Spirit grant us this holy dying and faithful living as we travel the road to which we are called.