

John 6:60-69

14th Sunday after Pentecost

September 5, 1982

I got into the car, backed out of the driveway, and started down the street. With me on my journey were two fellow travelers. They looked at me through the windshield, or so it seemed. I on the inside, they on the outside. They were grasshoppers, clinging ~~the~~ to the glass of the windshield, resting comfortably at first, then as the speed increased, visibly shaking and quaking as they hung on. The wind became a wall of weight against them, the leg of one hopper was torn loose from its ~~moving~~, then its whole body disappeared from view, the other hopper remained as if its feet were glued to the glass.

My journey was over one hopper remained, victorious.

I met a man at a wedding reception. My son is going to Wartburg Seminary in the fall, he told me. His father eyes sparkled joy, he waited to see that same joy reflected in mine. I disappointed him, I fear.

That's nice, was my response, or something equally harmless. I thought of pastor friends who serve congregations that don't like them, and pastor friends who have stood before annual meetings to become the target of nasty comment and criticism. But more I thought of me, and how I began, and ~~where~~ how it is now, and where the journey will end.

I thought I would make a good hood ornament on this vehicle called the church. My teachers told me I was smart, ~~very smart~~, that I had great ability. My parents were very strict with me, so that people commented what a good boy I was. My pastors told me what a great service I would provide by being a pastor. I looked around the world to see that people needed help, I said so confidently, I want to help people with my life.

Yes, I thought I would make a good hood ornament on this vehicle called the church. Out front pointing the way, standing strong in the wind, leading, directing, guiding, and showing, that was the place for me.

I gave a speech a high school graduation. We should, we must, we ought to, these were the ways I began the sentences, granting the assembled persons the gifts of my wisdom. I knew that I was good, and would get better, and that many would look up to me. He's going to seminary my parents said, with

a sparkle in thier eyes.

So I've climbed up on the hood of the car called the church. The ride started smoothly enough. I went out to the backwoods of Nother Dakota to impart my seminary learned wisdom. The people in that place called Goodrich sat up straight and listened. And said nice sermon pastor, and said, I's great to have you here. And I pointed the direction, confident that I could lead this people down the straight and narrow.

One day, though, a mother died and two sisters fought over the inheritance. They wouldn't speak, they stopped comeing to church because they did not want to worship with each other. I called them up, we will get together this afternoo to iron this thing out. For three hours they told their sides, I listened, and gave advice, sure that I could change them. But nothing changed. Absolutely notheng.

I preached, you should do this, you must do that, we ought to live in this way, I gave them a little time to get used to how things would be different with them, but the car just kept moving along. I would point left, or right but the car moved along as if under anothers direction.

And it kept speeding up. First it was the funeral of a grandmother, then the funeral of a month old child. The wind of events swayed me this way and that, until I could no longer point inthis direction or that, like the grasshopper I could only hang on, cling.

That's ~~where~~ I am today. I'm a grasshopper sitting on the hood trying to stay attached. The wind is blowing, and suddenly I'm realizing that this veh-ile called the church doesn't need me out here on the hood at all. It doesn't depend on my direction. It will not stop, noreven slow if I am lost.

I complain to a friend that it no longer matters whether I am here or not. If not I there will be another to preach. My life is going by and no one is changed, it seems such a waste to me.

But my friend probes deeper. Who am I to preach, I find myself saying. Maxxmanyxxevexxxesixsfxshxpspplstxwxkxixpzsxk I am not loving, a beggar comes to my door and I find myself wanting to keep him out of my life. I don't ~~write~~

invite him in but rush him off to the police station where he will be taken care of. I go to the hospital and often find myself thinking about me and what I should do, rather than concerned about this person lying there.

And I am not wise, I am ashamed of all the should and oughts that have come from my mouth. I have given childish answers to adult questions, I have pointed others in directions in which I would never want to follow.

And I am so full of doubts. War and cancer and unfaithful friends leave me wondering about this one called God. We hear his word, we share his supper why are we so little changed if he is really acting?

My friend listens what of Peter, he says. Was Peter changed, he asks. I know the answer, Peter was not. He denied Jesus before his death, after the resurrection he opposed Paul, he was ^{two} faced. Yet he clung to Jesus.

^{by saying to change the wind. . . .}
"After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him. Jesus said to the twelve, "do you also wish to go away? Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to who shall we go, you have the words of eternal life?"

It has always been the same. Many of his disciples drew back. They gave up on Jesus. The wind blew against them and they let go. Peter didn't.

The grasshopper looks at me through the windshield. What does he think? Does he believe that this car is under his direction. Does he think that he takes this car with him where he is going and not vice versa? The ride and the wind will teach him the truth.

Jesus drives the car. Indeed he is the car, the vehicle to which I cling. He is my hope, ^{taking} me to the destination which he has chosen.

Like Peter we cling to Jesus. Who we are, good or bad, rich or poor, honest or dishonest, smart or dumb, these are all incidental next to the one concern, clinging to Jesus. We have nothing to offer, nothing to give, but this clinging to him.

If we cling, the journey will one day end, victorious.