

Travel

Rev. Adam Lawrence Dyer, July 11, 2021

“Take me where you want to go, make it anywhere at all...”

This is the first line to a song called “Travel” by Richard Maltby, Jr. from the musical “Starting Here, Starting Now.” It’s not your typical musical; it is more of a revue and it is made of a bunch of left over songs from other shows that he and his collaborator David Shire wrote but that weren’t used or that appeared in unsuccessful productions. Their writing tends to create whole stories in each song which means that each piece can stand alone as a piece of theater on its own.

Because of that, “Travel” is a great audition song. Its easy to lift 16 bars from and it has a nice build. I was always attracted to its rhythmic pulse and how it speaks to a kind of wanderlust that I think many young people have. But there’s more to the lyric when you listen closely:

*Take me where you want to go, make it anywhere at all
Follow any winds that blow, any course that seems to call
Northward, southward, east or west
Take me different places, show me different faces
That’s the life I like best...travel!*

The whole song is in this kind of passive tense where the singer speaks of being taken on a journey...not of them going on a journey. There’s a powerful sense of dreaming and aspiration in a song like this. But really that’s the case with most real life travel.

Many folks in Cambridge speak of going to the Cape, or the Vineyard or Vermont or Maine. Many are incredibly blessed to have places they can also call home in these locations. This is part of the American dream where you not only have the security and comfort of a primary place of residence, but you’ve worked hard and been able to earn access to another place that isn’t about work or effort, but rather may be exclusively about family or some form of rest and renewal that is as important to you as your primary residence.

Yet even having a place like this is in some ways passive. You may have earned it and paid or still pay dearly for it, but what you are asking that second home to do in your life is take you to a place that you cannot access in your every day life. You put yourself in the hands of that place and hope that it brings you “vacation.”

Even when you go on an expensive holiday vacation to Europe or the South Pacific or the Caribbean, you have to have a good deal of trust. You have to trust that the airplane is safe and well maintained, that the pilot and crew are capable, that the weather will cooperate, that the

accommodation will be what you really want. You have to trust that your interactions with people in a foreign country will not be too difficult and that you will remain safe. If there was any word that I would use to characterize travel of any kind it is the word “trust.”

But life isn't vacation homes and trips to Rome for most people. Moving outside of the covid bubble and back into life may be the greatest accomplishment for some this year. Going to the corner store or a doctor's appointment or even the neighbor's apartment across the hall, may feel like a huge accomplishment...and it is. You see any kind of travel, not matter what the distance or the situation, is always built on trust.

For some, travel will always be having to trust that you will not bump up against intentional or casual racism as you enter spaces where you “don't belong.” For others, travel means trusting that you won't receive sexist verbal abuse on the street. For others, travel means having trust that you won't cross paths with police or ICE or someone who has an authority to tell you “you don't belong.” When those trusts are broken, we feel less safe and less eager to travel. We keep to ourselves. We isolate.

And yet for some, travel is a constant state of being as opposed to a unique or isolated opportunity. By many accounts, people experiencing any kind of homelessness are in a state of travel; a constant state of needing to trust. We recently agreed to let the Harvard Square Business Association place their “Community Fridge” along the north side of the church as part of the ongoing emergency covid response. Making more food more accessible is still crucial right now. The fridge is used constantly by many different kinds of people from around the area. People who are unhoused, people who are well groomed and headed to work. Hunger does not know any class or income level. Everyone I've seen use this service is in some state of travel...either to or from food. Seeing this happen on our property feels like an embodied expression of our covenant, much like Tuesday Meals “**...to nourish and serve each other, our community and our world.**”

Sadly, just yesterday, I was informed that there is objection to this community fridge on our property from the Historical Commission. Now don't get me wrong, I'm grateful to the commission for their support of our project to restore and make our building more accessible. They are great champions of protecting history and of how we show up in Cambridge. But when does holding on to the past become an obstruction to the needs of the present...let alone the future? People are hungry and in cooperation with our community partners, we've been able to be part of a solution. Being part of the solution has come about by providing a way for hungry people to trust that they can get food, no questions asked. Our hosting the Community Fridge even temporarily, so that it doesn't have to disappear, lets us contribute some small safety to those who are forced to live in a state of travel. I hope we are not forced to close it down.

Take me where you want to go, make it anywhere at all...

Do you ever consciously trust like that? Do you trust like that without being conscious of it? How are you privileged to be able to make all the assumptions about when, where and how you travel? If you had no choice but to travel, would you be able or willing to trust in the journey?

The other thing about this song "Travel" is that its actually a love song. It is not just about physical travel, it is about travel in relationships and how we grow into them and give ourselves over to them and trust in them. In the middle of the song there is a line:

*As the wife says, or the husband
As they're starting off on their life
Take me where you want to go, I will sail along with you*

The more and more I look at the song, the more I recognize that this is why we have covenants to hold us in relationship. As spiritual community, we are traveling both separately and together. We are on a journey together and as with any other travel, there must be trust. Trust in best intentions, trust in outcomes, trust when there is an ask for help. A covenant isn't an invitation to interrogation or a debate, it is a promise to travel together and to protect what is sacred to us all.

Knowing all this as background for the song and thinking deeply about how trust is foundational for travel, I think the odd twist at the very end of the song suddenly makes more sense:

*Sweep me off on our way...
I am at your command...
I will always be here...
Home*

May it be so.