



*The Unitarian Church in Westport*

## **SERMON TRANSCRIPT:**

### **Deliberate Wandering**

*By Judy Eckert*

*Sunday, June 30, 2019 10 AM*

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Good morning, I'm Judy Eckert. I've taken a lot of trips in my life. When I was a kid my father, Frank, would get out the maps and the travel guides and plan the annual summer vacation for myself and 2 of my sisters. It was always a road trip, taken in the family station wagon. Everything was planned, when to leave, where to stop to eat lunch, which Dad made the night before and packed in the ice chest. We always had ham and cheese sandwiches and Penguin sodas. He knew the route, the mileage and when we would arrive. He had the motel reserved. Very little was left to chance. That's called planning.

Planning is great, when it works. But there are things out of your control that can mess up any plan, no matter how diligent you are. My father would get so angry if his plans got messed up. Often, it involved a traffic delay over the George Washington bridge. One time he had so much trouble trying to navigate the Washington DC beltway that a motorcycle police officer escorted us to our exit. You might think this would be a good thing, getting help finding your way. Your family might look back on this and laugh about it years later. Remember the time we drove in circles on the beltway around DC, like 6 times. And that motorcycle cop had to help us? Not my family, we don't talk about it.

In many ways I'm very much like my father. I also like to plan before I go on a trip. I want to know the route, I calculate when I need to leave based on traffic at that time of day, and when I need to be there. If it's a short trip to a place I've not been before, like a new restaurant in New Haven, or get-together at someone's home, I will print the directions, memorize them AND have them on my GPS. I don't want to make a wrong turn! I'll even plan where to park.

When I plan a long trip, across multiple states, I take out the paper maps. I compare the different routes we can take, especially to avoid the Washington DC beltway and the George Washington bridge. I'll figure out where's the best place to stop if we need to break the trip into 2 days. I pack lunch, snacks and beverages in the cooler, just like my Dad. Depending on where we are going we might plan to purposely take a different route, just to see something new. I invite you to get out the old-fashioned, paper maps and plan a trip with your children or your grandchildren. Maybe you have a relative you haven't seen in a while, or maybe a friend moved away. Whether you take the trip or not, it's fun to plot a course on a map. I find it's much more relaxing to know where I'm going beforehand rather than mindlessly following the instructions of the bodiless voice of a GPS.

Sometimes I might take a wrong turn. Instead of getting angry about it like my father would, I think, hmmm, I wonder where this road will take me? It's much better than beating myself up over a wrong turn. I call this accidental wandering.

And then we have what I call Deliberate Wandering. I do this when I don't have to be somewhere, I have a general idea of where I'm going, or where I want to end up. I'll take a right turn instead of a left turn. Instead of turning I just go straight or in my case, gaily forward. I especially like to deliberately wander home after church. I could take the Merritt Parkway directly home to exit 48 but how much fun is that? Instead I pass the Parkway entrance and turn left at the second light, or is it the first stop sign, or maybe it's the first stop sign after the second light? I love to take the back roads. I'm pretty sure I'm still headed towards home, and I always get there, but sometimes I do take a round about route. Taking the back roads home from church I've found the Patterson Club, the CT Audubon society, and a great way to get to Trader Joe's in Fairfield without having to drive past the mega church on Black Rock Turnpike.

One Sunday, when I was taking the back roads, there was a detour because a bridge over the Parkway was closed for repair. I took one too many left-hand turns and ended up all the way down on the Post Rd in Fairfield. Now I was annoyed, this was way out of my way and the fastest way home was I-95. Boy was I mad at myself. And then I saw the Sunny Daze ice cream shop on the corner. Yeah, I stopped for Ice cream. I didn't take a wrong turn after all.

Another way to practice deliberate wandering is to take a hike, not with a destination in mind, but just walking into the woods for a period of time and then walking out. It doesn't matter if you get to the end of the trail, but what you find along the way. The wildflowers, birds, trees. What you'll see on the way out is different from what you saw on the way in **if** you're really paying attention. The point is you're deliberately NOT going somewhere. You are deliberately wandering. This activity supports one of the sources of our Unitarian Universalist living tradition and I'll paraphrase: "Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit..." You don't have to go far either; you can practice this right here on the grounds of our church. Wander through the meditation garden in the corner of the parking lot [point] or through the Memorial Garden behind me [point].

My spouse Liz is a deliberate wanderer. She thought it would be cool to live in Jackson Hole, WY. So she took a summer job at a KOA Campground. She thought she'd like to live in Denver, so she moved there, found an apartment and then got a job. A few years later she thought she'd like to live overseas. So she moved to Japan and taught English as a second language.

Here's another way to deliberately wander. Take a different route to work. When I was in college my friend told me that her father took the exact same route to work every day for 35 years. That stuck with me. I have, whenever possible, and by that I mean I didn't have a train to catch, taken various routes to work. I live in Bridgeport and work in Shelton. My commute isn't long; it takes me 3 – 4 songs and a weather report. I have 3

different ways to get there. All back roads, Route 8 to exit 11 or to route 8 exit 12. If I take exit 12 it's a straight shot up the hill to the building. If I take exit 11, I then have 3 more options, one of which means I can stop at Breuggers of a bagel and coffee. By taking the back roads I found the Bunny Fountain in Trumbull, so now I know where that is, and I found a Farmer's Market that I can go to on my way home in the Summer on Thursday's. When was the last time you took a different route to work? What might you find if you do?

What kind of wanderer are you? Do you plan every aspect of a trip? Do you know when to leave, what route to take? Do you always have a specific destination in mind? Have you planned your career OR have you let it take you wherever the next good job was? Are you open to wandering? Are you ready to just let the path, road, life, take you in a direction where perhaps you don't know where it will lead? Are you willing to get out of your comfort zone and try something different? Are you willing to be a deliberate wanderer?