

The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Girls Scouts got me thinking about youth and the road from youth to adulthood. If you listen to many young people, you'd be led to believe the road to adulthood is pretty short. say 14 or 15 years. And the road is a flat, straight, 8 lane highway; well lit and well marked.

But those of us who've travelled that road know the answer is not so clear cut. At some point one discovers the road to adulthood is not so much about a certain number of years, but more about the number of bends in the road. One discovers the road is longer than we thought, directions, less clear than we imagined.

Often one has to live for a while before one discovers that our life's path is often bumpy and has potholes. No matter how often we're told, we often have to discover for ourselves that life's journey is anything but a well lit, 8 lane highway. We have to discover that road signs can be written in a foreign language we didn't learn in school. We have to travel the road to learn it has sharp curves, it dips and that the climb up the mountain can appear to go on forever with no end in sight.

For some of us, life is a cornucopia of good fortune, good looks, good friends, a good partner, above average kids and more than enough money and status. For others of us, it seems we just can't seem to get it right, we can't get a break, little seems to go our way. For more than a few of us, we drive into dense fog and can't find our way. We get lost or sit on the side of the road waiting for the weather to change or for lady luck.

Somewhere along our journey we learn how things appear, at any point in time, is no guarantee they will remain so. Sometimes we hit black ice and out of nowhere life has changed dramatically. There is a divorce, or we lose our job or our health. Sometimes our lives are swept up in a tornado; sometimes it's a tornado of our own making, sometimes it just descends upon us.

As I look back on my life's journey, from my current station in life as a minister, I can now see I've travelled the yellow brick road to where I am today. I could have never predicted this is where I'd be. I had always imagined I'd be somewhere very different, someplace in another direction altogether. From the vantage point of my home, my starting out point, the road looked very different.

We all start our journey from home, however we define it. We somehow seem to know we need to leave home in order to find ourselves. And we all, it seems, endeavor to find home again. Sometimes, home is literally a place we hang our hat and hope to be comfortable. Sometimes home is an attempt to find a place in the world where we feel safe and protected.

But I've come to believe the real home we seek, the place that where we know who we are, it's a place that allows us to grow into who we want to become.

That's the story of the Wizard of Oz I think. Dorothy starts out at home, goes away from home and spends tremendous effort trying to get home again, to a place she feels most herself. That's why I think the Wizard of Oz has been such a mainstay in our culture for almost ¾ of a century now. It tells the story of our lives in so many ways.

We start out in innocence, in a home that may well not be the norm-Dorothy lived in a non-typical home, with an aunt, uncle, three farm hands and a dog; quite the family!. She didn't live with her father and mother like most folks. She lived in an atypical home environment. How many of us think we grew up with some amount of strangeness in our home... a family that expressed no emotion, a family with an alcoholic or abusive parent, a family with little or no money or with a sibling that was gay?

Then life intervenes, early or late in our lives, much to our amazement. There's a major storm that changes everything; an illness, a divorce, a death, an accident. And we don't know where we are. We have to take responsibility for our lives. We have to pick ourselves up and decide where we'll go from there.

We meet strange and different people along our way. They too may be stuck, lost or feel incomplete. They may appear odd or behave strangely. Do we let them into our lives or keep them out? How we treat them, how we engage them, matters, often more than we can imagine.

You remember Dorothy's story. A tornado carries her and her house away. It lands on the wicked witch of the east and kills her. Glinda, a good witch, of course, from the north, tells her the house has just killed a wicked witch. My guess is. Aunt Em or the farm hands never told Dorothy there were such things as wicked witches.

Then the sister of the wicked witch, the witch of the west, appears in a cloud of smoke. She seeks to claim her sister's magical, ruby slippers. Dorothy is then given, what may be, the gift of her life. Glinda does her own magic and puts them on Dorothy's feet, telling her to never take them off. She's told to follow the yellow brick road to the Emerald City, where the Wizard of Oz might help her find her way home again.

So Dorothy sets off to reclaim her life; with the words of the wicked witch of the West ringing in her ears, "I will get you my pretty!" How many of us have set off on our journey with the words of the church, our parents, societal norms, ringing in our ears, telling us to beware, or else?"

On the yellow brick road, Dorothy meets a scarecrow. He was hanging on a pole, working for someone else. This little, innocent girl with a dog, who appears too small, too

weak, too unworldly to be of any help to anyone, helps set him free. By all appearances, he was the kind of guy a mother would likely tell her daughter to avoid.

The scarecrow, like most of us, sees himself as wanting, as incomplete. He sees himself as "less than". He lives in a world of "if only". If only he had a brain! Dorothy gives him the gift of acceptance. She shares that she too feels a lacking in her life, the lack of feeling at home. She shared her sense of "if only". She gives the scarecrow hope for a better future. She offers him companionship. She offers to travel with him.

Are there strangers to whom you've offered companionship? Are there people you've opened up to? Shared your sense of lost-ness with? Are there people to whom you will be forever grateful, because they helped to save you, because they helped to change your life? We can never know the impact we can have on other peoples' lives by simply being friendly, being open with them, offering to share our journey.

Together, Dorothy and the scarecrow set off in search of their individual futures, in search of being fulfilled by some external force they are hope will grant them serenity. When they come upon a useless piece of tin, they offer redemption. They offer what can honestly be called resurrection of a life that has been debilitated by the years.

How many of us are here in this place today, because someone has offered us a form of resurrection? How many of us would not be here if someone had not reached out to us in our time of need, given us exactly what we needed to free us, to revitalize us? And then encouraged us on our way?

There is the lion, which is mortified by a lack of virility. A lion, erstwhile king of the jungle" lived with constant fear. An animal, much like ourselves, who wants desperately to live up to some expectation of how he was supposed to be. Because he lived according to external expectations, he felt a grave sense of lack in his life. His self esteem had been hijacked by an idea, a concept, by societal expectations.

As the story goes on, they arrive at their destination, the Emerald City, only to be disappointed that their hopes and desires were not to be met after all. A simple, honest request for help is met by another "if only." There are internal "if onlys" that wrap ourselves in. And there are externally imposed "if onlys", that others impose on us.

If only, you meet my needs, if only you behave as I think you should, if only you were younger, better looking. If only, you would change. The Wizard of Oz was working his own agenda when he told the trio, plus a little dog, he would consider, helping them achieve their dreams, if only, if only they did just this one thing for him. Bring him the broomstick that belonged to the wicked witch of the west.

They, like so many of us, in seeking their dreams, were willing to put themselves in harms way, do stupid things, for someone else's benefit, if only it would get them closer to what they wanted for themselves. We, so often, give ourselves away in hopes of satisfying our "if onlys." When we live from a place of "if only" we are easily used by people for their gratification. We can be used to fill a void in other people's lives; used to fill the void of their "if only."

To live in the "If only" is dangerous. It is dangerous for us and it can be dangerous for those we interact with. "If only" can blind us to our own self interest. "If only" can be a weapon we give to others to do us harm.

When we live from a place of "if only" we often blind ourselves to the truth of what is. And the truth of what is not.

The scarecrow felt incomplete, felt a great sense of lack, because he didn't have a brain. Yet, the truth of his actions demonstrated he was clever, creative in dealing with the realities he faced on the journey along the yellow brick road.

The tin man was a wreck! He could hardly move, he squeaked. He didn't have a heart so he believed he couldn't be compassionate. Yet he was moved to tears by empathy. The lion who was convinced he lacked courage was willing to go into battle when it mattered most.

After a long journey of travail, the Wizard of Oz explains that Dorothy's friends already had what they were in search of finding. And Glinda the good witch of the north tells Dorothy that she needed to learn that she didn't need to run away from herself in order to find herself.

How true for so many of us? We often fail to recognize that we already have all that we need to navigate our life's journey. How lucky are those of us who have someone to help us see that we are already whole, just as we are? How lucky are we who have someone to go the distance with us, to share our life's journey. How lucky are we to have a community that cares?