



Poland Presbyterian Church
At the Green since 1802

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Poland, Ohio 44514
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December 21, 2014
4th Sunday in Advent

Isaiah 35:1-10

The Rev. Robbin Del Nagro

“The Road Home”

In the little town where I grew up we lived at 302 Locust Street. All of the streets led to Main street. Maybe it was the same where you grew up. Certainly here in Poland there has been a Main Street for over two hundred years.

For the Israelites who had gone into captivity in Babylon there was no Main Street. They longed for home but it was only a distant dream. By the waters of Babylon they hung up their harps and sat down and wept for they could no longer sing songs of joy in a foreign land. This poem of hope from Hebrew scripture speaks to the longing of the Israelites and the longing of all of us for the road home.

How can we sing our songs of joy at this time of the year when there is so much despair among us? This week we bury two members of our church. We have other members who are in the hospital or alone in nursing homes. We have members who are dealing with life threatening illnesses. Around us and probably in more families than we realize there is marital strife, addiction, and worry over financial problems. How can we believe in God's promises to us when we find ourselves in the deserts of our lives where only fear and emptiness surround us? We all share in hopelessness at some time. These are the times when we struggle to find Main Street.

The poet Rilke writes, “The new that no one knows is silent.” It was silent for me one Christmas more than twenty five years ago. My teenage daughter had run away. My lovely, beautiful child so full of life; my heart, my joy. She was only seventeen and all I knew was that she was somewhere in Florida. More than six long months had gone by and I had exhausted all avenues of hope for finding her. I could imagine many dangers she might be facing and even had to face the fact that she might not be alive. The interminable waiting was filled with anguish. I

waslkd outside and imagined she was there, her bright smile warming the night, her blonde hair blowing in the wind. As I wondered where she was tonight, I pictured my lonely little girl so far away from her family Christmas and my heart broke. Where were the promises of God and what meaning would they have for me if she did not return? What I didn't know then was that something new was about to be born in both of our lives.

That Christmas I couldn't hear the phone call that would come many months later saying, "Mom, I want to come home." I couldn't see a lame and emaciated figure break from the crowd as she walked down an airport ramp and leap with joy into my arms. I couldn't see the five beautiful grandchildren born years later and the everlasting joy and gladness that they would bring to the world. I couldn't anticipate that my speechless mouth would one day sing them lullabies. No, this night I was lost in the desert.

When we have been swept into the desert we can see no roads. There is nothing there but miles of burning sand. In the desert we need to find our bearings because we cannot just click our heels together three times and magically find ourselves back in Kansas. We do not suddenly wake up on Christmas morning to find our fondest dreams wrapped up in a neat little package under the tree. The new which no one knows is silent.

For so many of you this church represents home, even though you may have grown up in another place. Some of you may just be here today visiting your family for the holiday, but you grew up in this church. And some of you might be visiting today, searching for home. Welcome home to all of you. Welcome home.

Hope leads us home to the place where love resides. Hope is often so silent that we do not realize it is even there. Like the tiny seed that God planted deep within Mary's womb, hope takes time to grow. To grow it must have a fertile place where water flows like rushing streams to bring it to life. How do we find the road that leads to this fertile place? Only God transforms deserts into gardens.

God comes to us in the dry and parched wilderness of our souls and makes a highway there where there was none before – a holy highway. God makes a highway so big that everyone who wants to walk there will have a place. This highway is the way, the truth, and the life and even fools who walk this way will never go astray.

When I was a little girl my parents would pack us up in the car about two weeks before Christmas each year. They would make two little pallets on the backseat floor for my brother and I to sleep and we would leave the back roads of rural Ohio and find our way to route 66. My parents would take turns driving through the night and when we woke the scenery would be different. When we got out of the car the air would be warm and by noon we would be at that house where

my grandparents lived at 302 Locust Street. And they would always play a 78 record sometime during the next two weeks, "I'll be home for Christmas, you can count on me." Route 66 took us home to the place of family and love where it was safe for our hopes to be reborn.

Will you come home for Christmas? Will you find route 66 like Mary and Joseph did on their journey to Bethlehem that night? Will you come home to Zion – to your center? Will you come home to Jesus?

Like route 66 the road to Jesus is not a super highway – it's sometimes bumpy and circuitous, but on that road home there will be no ravenous beasts to take our lives, our dreams, our joys. On that road home God will restore to us the years filled with anger and bitterness and fear and despair. God will restore to us the years the locusts ate and they will be redeemed for joy and gladness. And sorrow and sighing will flee away. And the new that has been silent will blossom forth like flowers in the winter snow, or the singing of a love song in the silent night, or a tiny babe named Jesus.