June 14, 2026 Prpr 6 Road Construction

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Spring and summer in Wisconsin bring warm days, the return of migratory birds, and our beloved snowbirds; bears and other hibernators are awake, baseball season is back, and so are the invasive orange barrels and cones, signs, heavy equipment, delays, and detours of road construction. Some folks even call this road construction season. While many people are enjoying some rest and vacation time, the men and women on the road crews spend summer's long days in hot sun, strong winds, and rain fixing and improving the roadways, sidewalks, and gutter systems.

I don't know how you feel when you encounter road work. Usually, I get frustrated and irritated because road work usually means slowing down, sometimes stopping and waiting, or being detoured on a different road that makes the trip take longer. These are things I do not like doing when traveling, both short and long distances. I like to get where I am going efficiently and safely. Ironically, to do that, the road crews have to do their work. And they don't have long to do it here in Wisconsin before it gets cold and snows. So, their work is important, and deserves a better response, because road construction isn't about me. It's about creating and maintaining safe access to everyone on the road so we can all get where we are going.

While lacking the iconic orange signs and barrels of road construction, today's Gospel and the other readings this morning call our attention to how God is at work on spiritual roadways God intended for God's people to follow. Starting in our first lesson in Exodus that establishes this roadway through the covenant between God and God's people, a relationship that didn't make God's people better than others. Instead, as God's people, they are supposed be roadways that leads others to God. In Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome, he wrote about how Jesus is the new roadway to God's grace. And in the Gospel, we read about Jesus – like a road crew - doing the compassionate soul work of liberating people from what was prohibiting them from being close to God by proclaiming the good news God's kingdom is near, teaching and healing. This work wasn't only for the people Jesus taught and healed. It was also for Jesus' disciples, who Jesus sent out to do the same work, like the road crews are sent all over the state.

The purpose of this soul work wasn't to make his disciples celebrities or fundraise millions. It was to heal spiritual pathways to God that had been neglected or abused, which is why Jesus sent them without extra stuff or bags, as a symbolic gesture they were relying on God and the generosity of those they met along the way. The good news Jesus preached is not a consumable to be purchased. It is a gift from God.

Today we interpret the gift of God's grace is for everyone, and believe God's love knows no boundaries, so it might make some folks uncomfortable that in today's Gospel Jesus sent his disciples to their own people and excluded the Gentiles. This is most likely not to be interpreted as being a permanent commandment, because after Jesus' resurrection the Risen Jesus gave what we call the Great Commission and sent his followers into the world to proclaim his resurrection and the new life of God's kingdom it brings to everyone. Perhaps just like road crews only work on certain roads during a season, Jesus first sent his disciples to their people because those were the spiritual pathways that needed attention first. Perhaps sending out 12 disciples could also be interpreted as representing the 12 tribes of Israel and through them God was at work restoring God's people to right relationship with God so that they could join in and through all of them the soul work of restoration, healing, and hope could continue into the world. In other words, this was a start, not the final commission.

Which brings us back to road construction, which I am sure you all noticed has been ongoing in front of the church for a while. Sometimes it is a major inconvenience because not only does the road crew close a lane, occasionally they have to close access to our parking lots in order to do their work. When that happens, I and whoever needs to get to the church have to drive around until we get to one of

the other roads that is still open, which means going the long way to get to the church. There are other inconveniences too, like not knowing the road crew's schedule and the noise and dust the work creates. It can make anyone grumpy, especially if we are around it all day.

While inconvenient, road construction can get our attention and remind us we all could use some soul work from time to time. After all, preventative maintenance and making improvements can have long term benefits not only to roads, but to our hearts, souls, minds, and bodies. Sometimes, like in today's Gospel, we need the soul work of hearing the good news of Jesus, healing, and hope that can bring us closer to God and each other. Metaphorically, that could be a temporary lane closure like taking a break or vacation to be in a place you love or do an activity you find renewing. It could also be taking a rest from doom scrolling the news and opinions on social media so you can notice the beauty around you. Maybe it means taking a metaphorical detour and trying something new, reading a new book, trying a new prayer practice like praying for the road crews, or a walking prayer, making a new recipe or revisiting something you haven't done in a while.

Like today's Gospel, road construction also reminds us not everything is about us, that we are part of a world where we can't control everything, and we need to make room for each other in order for all of us to get to where we are going safely. This is actually happening in front of the church, in the middle of the road construction right now. In the past, when leaving the church in the summer, especially when traffic is heavy, I could wait a long time before finding space to turn onto 51. However, this summer, when I leave the church and am waiting to turn onto 51, someone lets me in almost right away. I've heard others say the same thing. This has me wondering if our banner has something to do with this new expression of kindness and generosity from strangers. Especially because when I had to make the same turn further south, where the banner is not visible, that kindness was absent. Perhaps the message on the banner inviting people to slow down because soul work is in progress helps them navigate the road construction and its inconveniences with patience and generosity. This might seem like a small thing but God's love is often present in the smallest action. And what a big difference those small things can make especially when they help us all feel more connected. In its way, it is an expression of God's kingdom on earth, because it makes room for everyone creating a little hope and from a little bit of hope, more can grow.

While summer can fly by quickly, perhaps this summer's road construction can be a hopeful invitation to slow down and pay attention to where God is at work in the world, in our lives, and in our relationships, maybe in small ways, or in new pathways we might not have noticed, in all the ways soul work is indeed in progress.