

Today, we’re going to return to where it all began: sunrise on the morning train.

For some it begins inside the sterile green walls of hospital’s labor and delivery unit. Others of you will make your grand entrance within the four walls of the family home, aunts and cousins goading your arrival. And there are those of you whose morning train departure will not be complete until your arrival into the arms of your family—related not by blood and DNA but by the inseparable bond of tears, love, and longing. For me, it began inside the walls of a now-defunct Catholic hospital in Dallas, Texas, during the middle of a Monday night game between the Pittsburgh Steelers and San Diego Chargers. For all of us, the future is bright. As we embark upon a journey to only God knows where, the possibilities are endless.

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Weeks, months, or a couple of years later, you will be decked out in a white lace gown that generations before you have cherished and generations to come will wear. None of it feels comfortable, but as drops of lukewarm water drip down your face you go from an ordinary being into a holy one. You are a creature brought deeper into the fold of God. Neither you nor your parents understand the meaning of it all, but you have just received your marching order to love and serve the lovable and unlovable. While some of you have have not disembarked at the baptismal font, God’s mercy never stops preparing your way. Either way, there’s no time to dawdle here.

“All aboard,” the Conductor says.

Will you stay or will you go? Can you even know?

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The morning train continues as the dawn breaks on high. You pick up siblings and friends along the way. You play with the worms in the dirt. You paint with watercolors, and you master the art of riding on two, not three, wheels. You hear a melody and can’t help but tap your feet. You see words on a page and books become your secret hiding place. You don’t know that is what it is called, but you are growing. Changing. Becoming. Whatever it is, you are developing passions and interests, fears and dreams. At 5, I am certain I will be a school teacher; 7, a veterinarian; at 12, a speech-language pathologist; 15, a marine biologist, at 18, a speech pathologist...again. At 21, I am having too much fun to answer the question...What about you?

Through these early years of adolescence and young adulthood the morning train is always stopping and starting. We get on and off as we fall in and out of love and wave goodbye one last time to dads and moms and grandparents...and yes, even to fellow children. In these moments, we are certain we either got on the wrong train home or the Conductor has miscalculated the route. Things are getting complicated.

"All abroad," the Conductor says. "Do you stay or do you go? And if you go, which way?"

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At some point, the simplicity of the train at dawn—when the dew on the grass is still crisp and the possibilities are limitless—gives way to the heat of midday. It's that long period when what could be seems way too daunting for what is. So, you settle in and let the train pass you by for a while. Contentment and ease, success and certainty became much more enticing than the possibilities of embarking onto the next step. The faith of your childhood, or the lack thereof, is now a sea of questions full of unknowns. Nothing is as simple as it was. Two people certain they would be together forever find that they are pulled in different directions. So one gets off at the next stop, the other stays. The confusion and pain go both ways. "God, are you there?" you wonder.

But life keeps calling.

"All abroad." What does it mean to stay in this moment, what does it mean to go?

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Kids leave for college, the house gets quieter, and the train beckons you to a new phase of life. Some wonder...will wonder...if you want to climb aboard. You know you should, but it's scary, especially when the light of the sun shifts toward the west and what lies ahead looks to be more shadow than light. It's time to let the kids go, but you're scared of where that will leave you. To top it off, more and more folks you love are finding themselves on the express train home with God. Could you be next? Regrets abound, but so do satisfaction and creation. Take a look at back at where you've been. You've made it, *are* making it. Grace invites you to continue you.

"All abroad," the Conductor calls. Don't be afraid to keep going.

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As the train comes around the bend, you hear the singsong of the *Golden Girls*: "Thank you for being a friend." They sure made the last leg of the journey look like one easy party. Yes, there are aches and pains and memories too far gone in the recesses of your mind to recall, but what can beat traveling with friends, laughing, slowing down, and watching a new generation take root? It's not the *Golden Girls*, but it's your own kind of sitcom. Or drama. That's okay. Still share the same Conductor. Same journey. Same grace. Same longing of the same God to see you whole. Only differences are the route and the speed.

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This morning train starts at home and ends at home. What happens in between is a mix of the Holy Spirit and us, whether we say “yes” or “no,” whether we settle for what’s comfortable, what’s possible, or what was. Whether we live in the illusion of control and certainty, or the mystery and confidence of faith in a God who only wants to see the brokenness of our sin made whole—why else would God bother to leave glory for the muck and mire of the train? Yes, sometimes this trip is less a journey and more of an obstacle course. It can be unjust. We may want to throw in the towel with some cheap theology—“everything happens for reason.” Nope, that’s not the case. Sometimes it just happens. It’s what we do with it that matters. It was never to perfection that God called us anyway, only to faithfulness and wholeness, to living in the midst of life—with one foot in the present and one foot on the morning train to glory.

To be a follower of Jesus Christ, to be a child of God as 1 John puts it, is to embrace that who are now is not who will be. Claiming this as your foundation is not wishful thinking or an escape from reality. It is the hope that shapes our purpose and gives light to our steps. It is to be so completely transformed by Christ’s love, his compassion, and his power, that we shed the baggage we’ve carried—the fear, the anger, the regret, the what-ifs; the hatred, the darkness, the sloth, and the complacency—at every stop along the way. As the poet Rumi writes, and I was reminded of this week by our bishop: “This being human is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival. A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor. . . Be grateful for whoever comes, because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.”<sup>1</sup>

On this All Saints’ Sunday we remember and give thanks not only for those whose lives were so fully devoted to the calling of Jesus Christ, but also to remember what *this* life, *our* life is all about. Saints, we both know, were not successful people, they were ones who “fall down and get up.” They always sought to listen to the call of God and go. And when they got it wrong, when they made a wrong turn, when they took the wrong stop, they refused to stay put. They kept on going...on the morning train.

So you keep on going, too. You are child called to sainthood.  
You can settle on a paint color  
and what you will eat.  
You can even settle in relationships.  
But you cannot settle into thinking that your time is up.

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<sup>1</sup> Rumi quoted in Mariann Budde, “Blessed in All Things,” *Gathering Up the Fragments* (blog), November 2, 2017, <https://mariannbudde.com/2017/11/02/blessed-all-things/>.

I do not know when, but I'm going home on the morning train.  
You're going home on the morning train.  
All of us are going home on the morning train.  
Some of us are going to get there a little sooner than others.

If there is one thing I do know for sure,  
it's that each of you still has some living to do.  
So does this faith community.  
There are so many places to go,  
so many people to love,  
so many wrongs  
needing to be made right.

The train's 'a coming y'all.

You're not just going to let it pass you by are you?

All aboard.

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