

10 May 2020

Dear Friends of Elmwood,

It's hard to get well and truly lost. Ours is the brave new world of Google Maps, GPS, and 'Hey Siri'. Remember those awkward folding maps we used to keep in the car's glove box? Why bother now?

If you still bother, as I do, and if you want to join me in a harmless round of 'feeling a bit smug', Google these words: *Driving into the ocean and 8 other spectacular fails as GPS turns 25*. Technology is only as clever as the people who use it, isn't it?

An Old Technology

Maps drawn on paper or parchment are, like writing, an ancient technology. They depict a portion of the real world, making it more navigable. Used properly, they keep you from getting lost. But they don't dictate your destination or restrict your route. They let you decide those things for yourself.

My father loved maps and used them in his work. He was a forester. He wore the green uniform of the old Department of Lands and Forests in the far reaches of northern Ontario. His collection of maps and aerial photographs covered the vast region he oversaw, most of it accessible only by bush plane. He would colour in areas where forest fires had burned, draw new logging roads by hand, outline the areas where timber would be logged, and indicate others where reforestation was planned.

"Every map should have a legend, a scale, and indicate north," he taught me. Determining 'north' orients you in space. It's the first step in not getting lost. The scale tells you that an inch on the map, let's say, equals a mile on the ground, so you can measure the "miles to go before I sleep." The legend tells you what the map's markings mean, and therefore what to watch for: paved road, gravel road, bridge, railway, hydro dam, rapids, portage, contour lines, and so on.

Some of my father's maps were folded; others were rolled up, like the Torah in a synagogue, and kept in cardboard tubes. Really to see the 'lay of the land', you had to spread out the whole map.

One day, a bush pilot gave him an old map folded in a way he'd never seen before. You could flip its 'pages' like a book: forward to go east, back to go

west, up to go north, and down to go south. It meant you could have easy access to the whole map without having to unfold the whole thing.

My father was a pilot, too, and had his own small float plane. There was no room in its tiny cockpit to unfold a whole map. That evening he took this map apart, as if it were a piece of complex origami, to see how it had been made. Then he began making them himself. They're the only examples I've ever seen.

When I was going through his things after he'd died, I kept my eyes peeled for those maps. I wanted, perhaps, to learn how to make one myself, or at least save them for someone who could. But they were gone. I mourn the loss of this old technology.

'There be dragons'

All maps, whether you're making them or using them, rely on some degree of imagination. A map is a sketch of reality, but only a sketch.

The Argentinian writer, Juan Luis Borges, imagined the fictitious map of an Empire whose size was the same as the Empire itself, and which coincided with it point for point. If such a map existed, it would be useless.

A map's utility depends on its reduced scale and reduction of detail, its choice to depict some geographical features but not others. Of course, this choice reveals the interest of its maker and the aim of its user. I once had a map indicating all known mineral deposits near Lake Nipigon, but it didn't show a single gas station. Good for prospectors, but useless for car travellers.

Canada looms large on the Mercator projection of the world. The Peters projection corrects that illusion. Antique maps made by the first explorers are inaccurate too, yet we recognise the shapes – Newfoundland, the Gaspé coast, and isn't that Cape Breton?

Someone had to be first, sketching as they travelled. Their maps made subsequent journeys more navigable. When they came to the end of the 'known world', some mapmakers would write, "Here Be Dragons". It's where the map's legend turned into folk legend. Dragons are a warning to most but a lure to the intrepid few. Dragons guard treasure.

Some maps rely heavily on imagination. The medieval 'Mappa Mundi' in Hereford Cathedral depicts some real places, some imaginary. But its geography is all theological, not actual. Jerusalem is at the centre, the Garden of Eden at the top, and Britain on the outskirts. It reminds me of those maps of Toronto that

show its downtown in magnificent detail and Calgary is just a dot at the edge. “Just what we thought they thought of us,” say the Calgarians.

Other maps are pure invention: Tolkien’s middle Earth, C.S. Lewis’s Narnia, A.A. Milne’s Hundred Acre Wood. You can travel there too, but only on the passport of the imagination.

William Temple

One theologian whose works I’ve read in their entirety rose to be Archbishop of Canterbury during the Second World War. Throughout history, that episcopal chair has cushioned the behinds belonging to some remarkable minds. There was St Anselm in the 11th century, Thomas Cranmer in the Reformation, Michael Ramsey in the 1960s, and Rowan Williams in our own day. William Temple was in their class, but he’s largely forgotten. I remember him today because, as I compose these words, it’s the 75th anniversary of VE Day.

Temple’s wartime tenure was brief: 1942-1944. Churchill didn’t want him appointed. “Too socialist,” he growled; but then, most clergy were too socialist for Churchill. Though born with a ‘silver spoon’, Temple was loved by the working class. He was a powerful orator. He wrote complex, original books for academics and simpler, popular ones for the public.

Historians point to Temple as a major inspiration for the modern welfare state, though he never lived to see it. His deep thinking about God, philosophy, humanity, society, politics, ethics, law, justice, nature, and art was keenly felt in post-war politics, for a while at least. One of his last books, *Christianity and Social Order*, made waves. The time is ripe to dust it off and learn from it again.

When he looked back at his own life and work, Temple saw what he was trying to do all along. “I wanted to make a map of the world seen from the standpoint of the Christian faith,” he said. But what he began with the optimism of youth he despaired of in old age.

A curtain had come down on the world he knew. Christian faith could no longer be ‘imposed’ like the smooth grid of a map on the rough ground of reality. He didn’t live long enough to witness their horrors, but Auschwitz and Hiroshima severely challenged the serene map of the world he’d wanted to draw. It didn’t seem to have a place for them. What use was this map, then?

Can the Christian imagination still ‘map’ the real world? At what scale? Where is true north? What useful symbols would appear on its legend?

Temple did not 'lose' his faith. Neither have other deep thinkers I deeply respect who've refused to let go of faith, but who've also refused to shy away from the challenges posed by inexplicable suffering and human cruelty. Chastened, tested, Temple's faith only deepened. Even as it became quieter and questioning, it strangely strengthened.

"We have to face this tormented world," he said, "not as offering a means to its coherence in thought and its harmony in practice, but as challenging it in the name and power of Christ crucified and risen."

We still need maps to find the path through life. But they'll never completely coincide with reality. To be useful, maps must reduce reality. They can't show us everything there is to see. They'll never answer every last question we have. Some things we must decide for ourselves. Maps are like Scripture that way.

Lost and found

Only once have I been well and truly lost. It happened during the summer I turned twenty. Inspired by my father, I'd learned a bit of forestry at university. This gave me minimal credentials for some gritty, grotty forestry jobs in the summers.

On this occasion, I worked for a pulp and paper company alongside two other fellows roughly my age. A helicopter flew us far beyond the roads and railways to carry out a forest inventory on a new Crown Lease. It was called 'timber cruising'.

We travelled by canoe and camped in this wilderness, a tiny society of three. After three weeks, the helicopter would arrive at a pre-arranged location. On our few days off in a primitive lumber town, we threw ourselves into wild 'R and R', foggily remembered. Then we were flown back to work.

One time, the pilot seemed distracted. Once we'd unloaded, and he'd flown off, the oldest (not I) began looking around. "This isn't the place," he said.

He was right. Where were we? We had no idea. That stale cliché, "I have a sinking feeling", seemed suddenly fresh, yet still inadequate. If we didn't know where we were on the map, how could we get where we needed to go? How would we ever be found? We stared in different directions, silently pondering our plight. Dark clouds gathered, the air turned humid, and black flies ceased their social distancing.

One of us began to set up camp, while I and the other fellow paddled down the tiny river we'd landed beside – scarcely a creek, really – dragging the canoe over beaver dams, shooting some rapids, tracing its sinuous path. Skies darkened, our hunger deepened, and the river widened, until we came to its mouth, where it emptied into a lake. We paddled fiercely back to camp, arriving in the twilight's last gleaming.

In the glow of the fire, our 'boss' (or so he fancied himself, but that's another story) pored over the little sketch I'd made. He was comparing it to the aerial photos of the region. For as we'd explored this river, I'd made a rough map of it and marked some of its features. A big boulder in a clearing, barely visible on the photo, matched the location of the one I'd drawn. And my sketch of the river's twists and turns was just accurate enough to confirm our location on the map.

We ate, slept, decamped, and paddled away in the morning, arriving by mid-afternoon at the place we were meant to be.

I wish I still had my hand-drawn map. But like my father's specially folded ones, it's lost now. But I've loved maps ever since.

This and That

Many of you know Bill Booth. He recently had surgery in the University Hospital. Despite some setbacks, he has begun to heal and recover. Many of you know Mary Ritchie, too, who recently joined Elmwood. It saddens me to tell you that her daughter, Karen Dallas, died this week after a long illness. Let's remember Bill, Mary, and their families in our prayers.

Worship material is attached. Tell me how 'pandemic life' is going, if you wish. I *promise* not to go on so long next week. Really.

Yours in the faith,
Andrew