

Five weeks ago this weekend, I had just gotten on the elevator at Vanderbilt University Medical Center and pressed the button to go to the tenth floor. A woman on the elevator asked me, “Do you know where you’re going?” I was startled: maybe she worked at the hospital and thought I looked lost. “I think I do,” I said. I was on the way to visit a St. Andrew member who was a patient in the trauma unit. The woman continued, “Would you come with us to visit our son? We’re going to the same floor that you are.”

As we talked on the way, the conversation continued to be kind of strange. The woman and her husband seemed to be talking as if their son were dead. Then they told me what had happened. While he had been riding an e-scooter, their son had collided with a car: now he was on life support.

When we got to the desk where visitors are admitted to the trauma unit, we were told it would be twenty minutes before we would be able to see their son. I wrote down Brady Gaulke’s name and told the couple I would return after making another visit. Half an hour later, I found Brady’s bed and his parents with him. Then they told me their story.

They were from upstate New York. Their son, Brady, who was 26, was a physical therapist, and really enjoyed living in Nashville. He was very oriented toward helping people. Would I pray for him? I remember feeling confused and not being sure how best to proceed, but I prayed for Brady, for his parents and family, and for all the people he loved and who loved him. Then Heidi and Brian shared their names. They said that Brady had a long-term girlfriend in Nashville and that their younger son also was training to become a physical therapist. Heidi thanked me for coming with them. A day later, I learned that Brady’s parents had decided to remove him from life support and that he had died.

Since then, news about Brady’s death and scooter safety has continued. There was another article in yesterday’s *The Tennessean* with a photograph of the couple and Brady at his graduation. Last Monday, an article appeared in the *New York Times* that mentioned him and the ongoing debate about scooters. I’ve thought many times about Heidi’s first words to me, “Do you know where you’re going?” Obviously, I didn’t. And I wonder how often that happens to us. We think we’re going one place for one purpose, but then we find that we have a different purpose somewhere else.

Maybe something like that happened to Jesus when he stepped out of the boat on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. Did Jesus know where he was going? And did he know to whom he was going? A naked man who lived not in a house but among the tombs greeted Jesus, falling down and loudly crying out saying, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me!” This poor man was already deeply tormented, being kept under guard and shackled with chains. But somehow, he would break free of his fetters and roam about like a wild animal among the desert tombs. When Jesus asked the man his name, he said it was Legion, implying that a veritable multitude of demons were in him. It must have been hard to know who was really talking to Jesus: if it was the man or his demons.

Now the demons begged Jesus not to make them go back into the abyss, but to allow them to enter a large herd of pigs that was grazing nearby. “Do you know where you’re going?” Maybe the demons didn’t know where they were going either: when Jesus gave them permission to enter the pigs, the pigs rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned, apparently ending up back in the abyss anyway.

Do you know where you’re going? I doubt that we ever really do. A simple decision - like jumping on a scooter to catch a quick and seemingly easy ride - can change everything.

Margaret Renkl is a native of Nashville and a Contributing Opinion Writer for the *New York Times*. Last Monday, her article entitled “Scooter Madness,” began like this:

“Old friends of ours like to tell the story of the time they looked out their front window and saw a grown man propelling himself down their street on a child’s push scooter. Peeking over his shoulder was a baby in a backpack, squealing with glee. It was my baby.

“When they rolled up to our duplex a little while later, both the pink-cheeked baby and his father were exultant. I was not exultant. I was very, very far from exultant. In the unspoken division of parenting labor in our family, I was the cautious parent, the restrained parent, the consult-the-American-Academy-of-Pediatrics parent. My husband was the fun parent, the adventurous parent, the parent who sees a broken scooter, free for the taking, fixes it up and then takes it for a joy ride down a suburban commuter corridor with a baby strapped to his back.

“That baby is currently 27 years old and backpacking around Europe on his summer break from teaching. I’m glad he grew up with a daring parent. I’m glad he also grew up with a vigilant parent who insisted on helmets and kneepads and safety goggles and sunscreen...

“I hadn’t thought about that little green push scooter in years, but the tension between adventure and safety is playing out on the streets of Nashville - and many other cities across the United States and Europe - on a grand scale these days.”¹

Brady Gaulke’s grief-stricken parents have dedicated themselves to ensuring that no one else loses a member of their family in a scooter accident in Nashville: “we are calling on Mayor David Briley and the Metro Council to ban them from the streets immediately.” The Gaulkes say that Brady should be “the last victim of an epidemic that the e-scooter companies and local government both refuse to acknowledge.”² After recently speaking with Brady’s mother, Nashville’s Mayor Briley said, “any time we have that sense of loss in our community as a result of something we have put out there without necessarily thinking it all the way through, we have to go back and readdress the system.”³

The week before last, St. Andrew hosted a luncheon with Lutherans from a congregation in Germany. Bishop Gordy told me that the next day, he was taking our guests hiking, and asked me if I’d like to come, and I told him that I would. The next morning he came by the office and asked me if I was ready to go: his wife, Pastor Morgan Gordy, was waiting outside in a van to take us to meet our German friends at Christ Lutheran and go for a hike. I said I’d be ready in a few minutes.

But I had not followed the Boy Scout motto: I really wasn’t prepared. My hat and hiking sticks were in my car, but in my haste, I forgot to get them. Nor did I have a daypack or bring a lunch. But fortunately, Morgan had packed me a lunch, which someone else carried in his pack, along with my water bottle, and I was loaned a hiking stick. I wasn’t even sure where we were going, but I knew it was about an hour and a half southeast near Sewanee.

We had a beautiful hike, visiting the remains of an old Civilian Conservation

¹ Margaret Renkl, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/17/opinion/electric-scooters-nash...7fcd0a041764257e09f05026®i_id=36428724emc=edit_ty_20190617

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

Corps camp that was built in 1935, and hiking along a creek with waterfalls. At one of the waterfalls we ate our lunch, and four of our German friends went for a swim. Then, as we resumed our hike, I lost my balance on a slippery rock and fell, hitting my head on another rock. Once again, in spite of me being unprepared for this, one of the Germans had a First Aid kit with him, and people with know-how patched me up. Then we resumed the hike back to the van.

Initially, we were planning to go to a nearby Emergency Room. But when we learned it didn't have an MRI machine, since I was doing okay, we decided to go on to Franklin. We stopped at the Gordy home, got another car, and Bishop Gordy took me to the ER at Williamson Medical Center where I was examined and received five stitches in my head.

Do you know where you're going? Obviously, I didn't know where I was going that day. As a song John Lennon wrote for his son Sean when he was a little boy affirms, "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans"⁴ - or in my case, failing to make plans.

There are tradeoffs in our need and desire for adventure and safety, both for ourselves, and for those we love. Pretty much anything can happen anywhere and there are no guarantees.

But more often than not, even when we are not prepared, God has our back through the care and the concern of others. So we go out into our daily lives in faith. Not really knowing exactly where we are going or what the day will bring, we follow God's command to set off on our journey each and every day. There's a reminder of that above my office door - a reminder from a former refugee.

Forty some years ago, a mother and her little daughter came half way around the world from Vietnam to Virginia. The first baptisms I ever performed included them: Trang was six years old then. A few years later Trang Americanized her name to Shane. When she was a high school student, Shane gave me her calligraphy art project after her teacher had graded it and returned it. Shane had chosen a Bible verse, Joshua 1:9, and used *The King James Version* of the text. I had it framed right after she gave it to me. It has hung above the door of my office for eleven years: "Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest."

⁴ "Beautiful Boy (Darling Boy)" on the album *Double Fantasy*, 1980.