

You're Headed in the Right Direction

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Rev. Denise Lynn Smith

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[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

Del: Good morning everyone. I'm here to introduce our speaker today. Reverend Denise Lynn Smith was born in Harlem, NY and Reverend Denise Smith earned an associate's degree in business administration, a bachelor of science in business management and communication and an MBA from RIT. She also earned an MDiv. from the Colgate Rochester Crozier Divinity School in preaching and pastoral care. Reverend Smith is an ordained minister serving in the American Baptist Churches USA and an itinerant deacon in the African Methodist Episcopal Church at Baber AME church. Reverend Smith is a veteran of US Air Force and we are thrilled to have her here to speak to us today. Let's give her a warm welcome!

Reverend Smith: Thank You, thank you. Hi everybody! Wow, look at the crowd this morning! Well we are having really great worship already right? Anybody crazy? Got a mental health issue - Crazy for Christ? I'd rather be crazy for Christ in cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs. Great. (Singing) I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back, no turning back. The world behind me, the cross before me. Leaving the world behind me, following the cross before me. The world behind me, the cross before me. No turning back, no turning back. Oh no, no turning back. I can't turn back. We won't turn back. We won't turn back. (Speaking) Anybody feel that way? We had a great service, the first one. And we're going to go ahead and move into the second one as soon as I get my document here. Humm, you know what happened is I turned all the pages around and forgot to turn them back. Here we go page numbers. Others keep on singing, (everyone singing) I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back, no turning back. Hey great! Right on time.

Let's talk a little bit about traffic signs. Traffic signs are everywhere and for almost every occasion. There's a stop sign, slow down, yield, enter, do not enter, wrong way, exit, on coming traffic, no u- turns and this one, no parking. Even reserved parking. They help us to live within the laws and help us to avoid getting those high cost tickets that we get in the mail. They help us also stay out of accidents and so on. Traffic signs. About a month ago I had the opportunity

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to encounter a traffic sign that was new to me. It was flashing and it said you're headed in the right direction. Now I was traveling on an unfamiliar road. And it was 2 way traffic and the shoulders of the road were being repaired. So the directional lane lines were redrawn to compensate for the narrowness of the road. Even though I had my navigation and I knew where I was going, I did need something else. Something a little bit more. I needed real time direction, protection and assurance. Assurance that I was on the right side of the road. This event reminds me of Exodus 13, 22 which was already read. Finally free to go where God would lead them to go. From where they were familiar to a place where they were unfamiliar. Traveling through a dry and desolate place to get to a place flowing with milk and honey, the irony of that. So they travelled day and night to get out of the desert, out of the wilderness away from their, um, the slave drivers. They didn't have a map. They didn't have Mapquest. They didn't have Google. They didn't have a G.P.S. hitched to their carts and buggies. There wasn't any traffic signs that said promised land this way. All they had was what God miraculously provided for them, a directional sign in the forms of pillows clouds by the day and fire by night. Signs for direction, protection and assurance. Would you say that with me? (everyone speaking) Direction, protection and assurance. Direction. Directions exist because there is a destination to be reached. I'll say that again, directions exist because there is a destination to be reached. Have a destination. The Israelites had a destination. We all have a destination. A destiny. A purpose. Directions take us from our past into our future. Don't you just, I just love Winnie the Pooh. He's like my favorite. Anyone seen Christopher Robin? Winnie the Pooh said it like this, "I always get to where I'm going by walking away from where I have been." So simple. Sometimes we need to go in a different direction. Why stay the course when where you're going is not fulfilling you anymore. Why stay the course? You have to have a destination. Protection. The need for protection means there must be danger up ahead. Pharoah and his armies were chasing them and they needed protection. At one point the pillar of the cloud that was leading them actually came behind them and confounded the army. God had their back. And their enemy had to say and to clear that God is protecting them. We need protection to keep us from being pulled back into situations that God has already delivered us from. I hear an amen in there somewhere. Sometimes a situation that you thought you were free from comes right back, just to see if you've learned anything. And that's really God's protection. That's when we need to remember, and never forget, where God has brought us from. And that God still has our back. And we need to stay free, that's what protection is for. To keep us free, keep us safe, to keep our sanity. Harriet Tubman said it this way the great abolitionist she said, "If you hear the dogs, keep going. If you see the torches in the woods, keep calm. If you are shouting- If they're shouting after you, keep going. Keep going, don't ever stop. Keep growing if you want a taste of freedom, keep going you're headed in the right direction.

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Assurance. Assurance is needed when we are in unfamiliar places or unfamiliar situations. The Israelites were headed somewhere they had never been. They were leaving, how be it, a bad place to go to a good place. But in between that was this wilderness. When we are leaving our bad place to go to a good place that God has provided for us, and promised to give us, we will also encounter times of wilderness and loneliness and feelings of isolation because when God tells you to go somewhere he doesn't always tell you friends. He does not always tell your boss, your coworkers or even your family and so you find them turning around and going in another direction from you and you find yourself in the wilderness. And sometimes the wilderness season makes us want to return to the familiar just so we can feel normal. But the new normal is not feeling normal. And who wants to feel normal? Who wants to be normal when we could be extraordinary? Right? This is when we need the most assurance. It's when we need a sign that we are headed in the right direction. Well meaning family and friends speak to your wilderness and ask you if you are you sure that that is where God is leading you. Anybody ever heard that before? Well. They don't know everything and neither do we but God knows that we're headed in the right direction. We no longer have to hope if we're headed in the right direction. We have Jesus. Through his life, through the Scriptures, with help of the Holy Spirit we know when we are headed in the right directions. Even when life happens, and believe me it will happen, hold your head up because you're headed in the right direction. When you are afraid and your faith fails you, you'll be comforted. Whatever it is that God has asked you to do, you do it! Even if you're afraid, do it afraid anyway. You're headed in the right direction. When you're the only one in the room who will speak to the injustices, corruption and they try to scandalize your name. Speak up and speak out you're headed in the right direction. When you stumble and fall, get up dust yourself off and remember we serve a God of second chances! You're headed in the right direction. If you're crying all night long. If you're weeping, remember that weeping may endure for one night, but that joy comes in the morning! Honey somebody's joy and morning is coming, you're headed in the right direction. When you're tempted to follow the crowd, don't worry. God will lead you back. You're headed in the right direction. When your back is up against the wall, there is a sign that says keep moving! God will make a way! You're headed in the right direction. When the doctor says there's no cure there is a sign that says by my stripes you are here you're healed! You're headed in the right direction. When you just can't seem to get a break. Things are just coming at you and you just keep going and keep going and keep persevering remember you are headed in the right direction. When you stumble and fall get back up. Tell your story, yes tell your story. Talk about how you survived. Make space and room for those who are suffering with that, help them to get it out. You're heading in the right direction. When you keep moving and grooving, your enemies they get confused, they don't understand. You just headed in the right direction and you don't stop. They get so confused. They wonder what in the world is this person doing when they're working

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so hard, they're getting things done and they're getting accomplished and they're getting across and they're going where God wants them to go. I wonder if they're hiring, I need a job. You're enemies, looking for a job from you. My God.

No matter the circumstances. No matter the location. No matter what it looks like. No matter what it feels like, and it can feel awful, and you know God is leading you somewhere keep going, you're headed in the right direction. And for us who are young at heart in here or, if you are young at heart in here, remember Rudolph will guide my sleigh tonight!(Laughter) Heading in the right direction. When you feel like you're not getting anywhere. Anybody ever feel like you're just not getting anywhere? You're just like motion and nothing is happening? And sometimes, you know, that that's a little sign that says slow down. Sometimes when you wait, then somewhere will come to you. Listen to the voice of Christ. Wait on the Lord and be of good courage. You're headed in the right direction. If you're going to visit the border to bring food and clothing your headed in the right direction!

I was riding with my niece because my 1st cousin, just a couple of days ago, and I travelled to Newark and I got there late at night. And um we wanted to go to this buffet that we heard had like food from all over the country and you know we got lost getting there but we made. It closed at 10:30 we got there at 10. I had to pay \$15.00. I know I couldn't eat of \$15.00 worth of food in a half hour but I tried my best, I just grabbed all the meat. I had to salad for lunch so I didn't need any vegetables. Anyway as we are leaving, and she's taking me to the hotel because I never even checked in because I wanted her to go to the buffet so, she's taking me to the hotel and it's night. It's late and she's from New York not New Jersey so that's like a new planet for her, that's just not the same. It's not the same thing. If anybody doesn't know that, I'm telling you now it's not the same thing. And we're getting on this entrance onto the thruway, expressway, and it's kind of curved. Sort of like that. And it's late at night and as we're getting on I see we see this big truck with these big lights coming right at us. And we think that's it, it's over, Jesus come and get me now. I don't want to feel any pain. It looked like because of the way it was, the road was curving, that it was on coming traffic when in fact we were in the right lane and we were headed in the right direction. Don't worry about what it looks like, stay the course. It's about perception sometimes. You're headed in the right direction. If you're grieving, look there are just somethings that just bother us the most, I call in the 3 Ds: death, divorce and I can't remember the other one right now (laughter). But there's another one. And, what did you say? OK I thought somebody had it for me. But it's death and divorce and (person in congregation says disappointment) there you go! Those are the things that tend to get to us the most, relationships. And so we grieve the loss of our loved one or loss of a job. We grieve those things right? And we want to know how, God, are we're going to get on the other side of this? Well if anybody knows about the process of grief, there really is no other side. There's just

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heading in that direction. Just keep going. Weeping will endure but joy will come. Just keep going even in your grief. When you're walking away from a bad situation, a bad relationship, bad job, a bad car choice. Keep going, you're headed in the right direction. In a world where right is wrong. Or where wrong is right and right is fake news. We need a sign. When what we have is more valuable than who we are. We need a sign. Thank God for Jesus. We don't have to hope we're headed in the right direction, we've got Jesus. He is our direction. He's the one that tells us come this way! Enter! Stop, halt, slow down! There are no u- turns here baby, keep going. Jesus. As long as we follow the Lamb of God, Jesus, we're headed in the right direction- Jesus. As long as we follow Jesus, the lily of the valley, we're headed in the right direction. Jesus, the bright and morning star, follow Him. Jesus the King of Kings, Jesus the Lord of Lords, Jesus the Good Shepherd, Jesus our Messiah and our redeemer and our savior. Jesus is our sign and if we follow Him then we are? (congregation) Heading in the right direction. (Reverend Singing) I have decided to follow Jesus. (All singing) I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back, no turning back. (Clapping)

Del: Thank you Reverend.

[end of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information visit us at ArtisanChurch.com