

A Lenten Journey: Know Where You Are Going

Sermon: February 28, 2010

Second Sunday in Lent

Texts: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Philippians 3:17 – 4:1; Luke 13:31-35

Our Lenten journey continues. We have been exploring the theme of Lent as a journey with many dimensions. It is a liturgical journey between two crosses – the ash cross of Ash Wednesday to the cross of Good Friday. It is a scriptural journey as we follow Jesus from the wilderness to the garden. It is a spiritual journey as we look inward and discover those journeys of our own lives as summarized by our Lenten theme: Journey from Fear to Love.

Each Sunday we will have a sub-theme of sorts. Last Sunday, our theme was: ***Prepare for the Journey***. The symbol for that theme was a pair of hiking boots and a flashlight. Through the story of the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness, we learned the importance of preparing for our spiritual journey knowing that there will be temptations and obstacles along the way. Just as the goal of our liturgical journey during this Lenten season is to prepare for the celebration the resurrection of Jesus on Easter, the goal of our spiritual journey is to be reconciled with God and to dwell once again in the garden. The garden symbolizes a life filled with goodness and abundance.

This morning's Lenten journey theme is: ***Be Clear About Where You Are Going***. This theme is based on verse 33 in our Gospel lesson for today where Jesus says, *"Yet, today, tomorrow and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem."* The goal of any journey is to arrive at your destination. But in order to arrive at your destination, you need to know where you are going. And so the symbol for this morning's theme is a map. A map is the single most important tool that you can use in order to make sure that you get to where you intend to go.

In our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus shows that he is very clear about his destination and how to get there. His destination is Jerusalem. He knows full well that Jerusalem is the primary focus and goal of his ministry. He knows why he is going to Jerusalem. He knows that it is part of God's plan of salvation.

He also knows that there will be attempts along the way to prevent him from reaching his destination. And there will be many things designed to distract him from his task. Last Sunday we read about the great spiritual battle he faced when the devil tried to stop him even before he began with a series of temptations. But Jesus would not be dissuaded from his journey.

Today we read about another attempt. This one comes from Herod. Herod was the Roman overseer of the region of Galilee. And clearly Herod was beginning to get nervous about the attention that this itinerant rabbi was getting. The Jews were beginning to talk about his being the Messiah, which in Herod's mind had

clear political overtones. So word reached the Pharisees that Herod was planning on having Jesus killed, just as earlier had John the Baptist killed.

Yet Jesus clearly indicates that Herod is not a threat to him. He responds with a surprising bravado that most people would not show when their life is threatened. Jesus says, "Go and tell that fox for me that I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will finish my work." In other words, Jesus is indicating that he is dealing with a greater kind of power, one that can cast out demons and perform miracles, and no power that Herod may claim to have will keep him from doing the work that he has been sent to do. My work, he says, will go on today, tomorrow, and even the day after tomorrow, until it has run its true course in Jerusalem. It is in Jerusalem that he will surrender temporarily to earthly power in order to give witness to a greater, more divine power. He will die in Jerusalem, just as many of the prophets have died before him, in order to make it possible for all people to experience new life in God.

The journey certainly is not without a sense of sadness. Not only was Jerusalem the great center of Jewish life and culture, it was also, since the time of King David, the center of Jewish faith. Jerusalem is often called Zion, the city of God. It is where the temple is located. Many people even believed that when you entered into the temple you were in the presence of the Almighty.

And yet, it is also in the city of Jerusalem where the messengers of God's often met the strongest resistance to God's word. In many ways, the people of Jerusalem often had the most to lose when God's prophets called for repentance and change. People rose to power in Jerusalem. People got rich in Jerusalem. People had great social status in Jerusalem. And so it was the people of Jerusalem who were most resistance to anything or anyone that threatened their wealth, power and social status.

So in beautiful and very feminine imagery Jesus laments the centuries old attitudes that have created such resistance to God's will and word, "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" In other words, I wanted to gather you under the protection of God's abundant life, but you were not willing to make the sacrifices necessary to experience that life. You will not be open my ministry, as I usher in God's plan of salvation, until that day I enter into Jerusalem for the last time, a day on which many will sing, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

That phrase, by the way, is a phrase that was traditionally sung to victorious war heroes when they returned to Jerusalem after battle. It was Jesus way of saying that he will enter into Jerusalem as a triumphant warrior. But his battle will not be a political one, but rather a spiritual one. For at stake are the lives of all of God's people.

So we who are on our spiritual journey during this Lenten season are encouraged to be clear about the destination of our journey. With the psalmist we seek the presence of God who is our light and our salvation and the strength of our lives. We seek to dwell in the house of the Lord and to behold him in his temple. We seek to come face to face with and to know a loving and compassionate and forgiving God. We are all on a journey to come into the presence of God.

It is not an easy journey. There are dangers. There are those who would not have us be successful in this journey. There are times when it seems as if the journey is too long and the obstacles too difficult. But on we must journey, for there is no other way to life. As the psalmist says, "What if I had not believed that I should see the goodness of the Lord, in the land of the living?" It is inconceivable to image a life without God. So we must be clear on the destination.

And finally, we can be encouraged by the final words of the psalm, "Oh, tarry and await the Lord's pleasure; be strong, and the Lord shall comfort your heart; so wait patiently for the Lord." These words are echoed in the final sentence of Paul's letter to the Philippians, "Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved."

This is not a journey we take alone. This is a journey that we take all who are a part of the community of faith. When we prepare for the journey and when we are clear about the destination, we do so knowing that the end of the journey is the abundant life with God.

Thanks be to God! AMEN!