

“The Way to Jerusalem”

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2 Samuel 5:1-10

Luke 9:51, 13:31-35

“And the time drew near for Jesus to be taken up into heaven.

So, he ‘set his face’ to go towards Jerusalem;

He was determined to confront Jerusalem.”

Let us pray... O God,

Help us to accept your upward call to the life-journey of faith

and help us to accept that others are on their own journeys, too –

welcoming the friend and willing to transform the foe. Amen

I love that phrase ‘he set his face to go to Jerusalem’ –

as another way of saying, “he made up his mind”,

resolute no matter what.

We’ve seen that kind of resolve in people like terrorists

who have made up their mind to follow through on their purpose

without regard for others – let alone their own self-destruction.

But there is another verse from scripture that distinguishes

stone cold conviction from cool courage

and it comes from the ‘Love’ chapter in 1 Corinthians 13...

...if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

1 Cor. 13:3b

We have been following those events that led up to Jesus’ decision

to go to Jerusalem and face martyrdom.

It began with a martyrdom – the death of John the Baptist, a public figure

whose fiery oratory earned him the anger of the political powers.

By criticizing Herod Antipas

for his affair with his brother Phillip’s wife, Herodias,

John soon became a target when the occasion arose.

It was Herodias herself, though, who took matters into hand

for she had a lot to lose if Herod backed out of their relationship –

now that it was public knowledge.

Phillip could easily divorce her and she would be on the street,

a powerless woman.

But with the help of her beautiful daughter’s provocative dance,

Herod was trapped into getting rid of John and keeping Herodias.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus reacted to the news of John’s death

by withdrawing without a word to find solitude

in a desolate place on the other side of the Galilee.

Willard, p.2

Apparently it was a place everyone knew about,
because thousands followed and were waiting for Jesus on the beach
as he climbed out of his disciples' boat.

Herod's appetite for pleasure was placed in sharp contrast
with Jesus' hunger for justice, represented by
the feeding of that multitude of more than 5,000 people.

What follows seems to be a return
to the desert of temptation at the start of Jesus' ministry.
Jesus mocks those original challenges as uninspired, self-serving acts
by performing extraordinary deeds of power.
Instead of turning stone into bread,
he turns bread into more bread for the sake of many hungry people.
Instead of leaping off a tall building to show that the angels will protect him,
he walks on the waters of a stormy sea like the Spirit of God
hovering over the watery chaos of Creation.
Instead of kissing the foot of Satan – the Lord of the Things,
to gain worldly power, Jesus' disciples kiss the feet of Christ,
the Lord of all.

The crowd that remained on the other side of the sea
wasted no time getting back to Capernaum in Galilee.
There, they tried to corner Jesus into giving them more free food.
But he tries to teach them about the true food and true drink
we all really need to sustain ourselves in life
and the origins of that nourishment.
But they are horrified when he tells them
it is to be his flesh and blood.
It is clear then that Jesus is thinking – and planning for his own martyrdom.
And his greatest fear is that the disciples just don't get it
and he will die for nothing.

He questions his disciples to find out if they really understand who he is.
They sort of get it, so he begins to repeat time and again this promise:
*The Son of Man, the True Heir of Humanity,
must suffer and die, but on the third day rise.*
And he reinforces this by taking his three trusted lieutenants,
Peter, James, and John, to climb high up a mountain
to witness the transfiguration of Jesus into his true identity.
Once again, they return to the world and its troubles and once again,
Jesus demonstrates his mastery over the evil spirit of despair.
He is now ready.

Willard, p.3

In our Hebrew Bible text lesson, we heard how David was anointed in God's name and appointed to be the leader of the people of Israel.

What remained yet to do was to consolidate his kingdom with the capture of Jerusalem – the 'City of Peace', which so often in history has been anything but.

The Jebusites living there refused to give their allegiance let alone welcome David.

Instead, they mocked Israel saying – even if they were blind and lame, they could still beat them.

David responded with a politically incorrect remark about despising those who are handicapped –

but his point was they were spiritually blind and culturally crippled from recognizing and responding to the changing times.

Israel was aligning itself to the will and purpose of their God who was proving greater than anyone's tribal god.

Rather than a frontal assault,

David takes Jerusalem much the way he defeated Goliath – economically simple and technologically clever.

Jerusalem back then was built on a hill called Mt Zion which had an underground stream that formed a tunnel with access to the surface.

The text merely says that David's soldiers climbed up this way and captured the city – and mentions no one even being killed.

However, Jesus would enter Jerusalem through one of the principal gates – basically, going through the front door to conquer it, but much like his ancestor David,

he would do it in a way that has had a lasting impact.

The City of Peace is an elusive goal just like the Beloved Community and the American Dream.

The world is still a dangerous place made more dangerous by fear and suspicion that fester into racism and murder.

The Trayvon Martin case is such an example for this country just as the Mohammed Merah case is for France.

Two very different situations, but both linked by ethnic hatred, men with guns, and the challenge to look for truth deeper than appearance.

You might even say there is a third perspective on 'judging by appearances' with allegations against a US Marine sergeant named Robert Bales.

I encourage you to look into the details of the situations surrounding each of these individuals so that you may come to your own conclusions.

Willard, p.4

Trayvon Martin – a kid, was walking back
to his father’s residence in a gated community
after buying candy from a convenience store.

He had on a ‘hoodie’ – a hooded sweatshirt,
which he wore up because it was raining.

George Zimmerman – a community watch volunteer,
called in a 911 report and described what he saw as a suspicious
person in his neighborhood.

Zimmerman was told not to follow the suspect,
but he did anyway.

Whatever actually happened from then on remains to be told,
but the facts are that a European-American man was armed
and now an unarmed African- American teenager is dead.

This tragedy was further complicated by the actions and neglect
on the part of local police – whose uniforms symbolize them
as ‘good guys’ who are supposed to uphold the law for everyone.

Jesus was most likely dark-skinned and at times he wore a ‘hoodie’ –
or at least a prayer shawl that looked that way.

And he would be arrested and put to death for his provocative behavior
as if he were a criminal or a terrorist.

Martin Luther King challenged us all to judge others only
by the content of their character and not the color of their skin.

Knowing the difference between who is dangerous and who is a help
is not easy to do – and I’ll speak for myself in that regard,
but I know it’s the way forward.

Everybody’s got a bias and everybody is afraid these days,
but we must learn to listen long enough to hear the truth
beyond what we think is true,
and look deep enough to see what is real
beyond the cultural costume,
and be willing to put yourself into the proverbial shoes of someone else
to walk that mile with them before you judge.

That is the way into ‘Jerusalem’ – the ‘City of Peace’ that is yet possible.

And Jesus said,

‘You won’t recognize me until the time comes when you say,
“Praise to the one who is coming on behalf of the One Who Is God!”

Amen

Our lesson from the Hebrew Bible today

comes from 2 Samuel 5:1-10.

It tells about the anointing of David as the King of Israel

and how he consolidated his power by taking the city of Jerusalem...

¹Israel's leaders met with David at Hebron and said,

"We are your relatives.

²Even when Saul was king,

you led our nation in battle.

And the LORD promised that someday you would rule Israel

and take care of us like a shepherd."

³During the meeting,

David made an agreement with the leaders

and asked the LORD to be their witness.

Then the leaders poured olive oil on David's head to show

that he was now the king of Israel.

⁴David was thirty years old when he became king,

and he ruled for forty years.

⁵He lived in Hebron for the first seven and a half years

and ruled only Judah.

Then he moved to Jerusalem,

where he ruled both Israel and Judah for thirty-three years.

⁶The Jebusites lived in Jerusalem,

and David led his army there to attack them.

The Jebusites did not think he could get in, so they told him,

"You can't get in here!

We could run you off, even if we couldn't see or walk!"

⁷⁻⁹David told his troops,

"You will have to go up through the water tunnel to get those Jebusites.

I hate people like them who can't walk or see."

That's why there is still a rule that says,

"Only people who can walk and see are allowed in the temple."

David captured the fortress on Mount Zion,

then he moved there and named it David's City.

He had the city rebuilt, starting with the landfill to the east.

¹⁰David became a great and strong ruler,

because the LORD All-Powerful was on his side.

Inspired by Luke 9:51

AND THE TIME DREW NEAR
FOR JESUS TO BE TAKEN UP INTO HEAVEN;
SO, HE 'SET HIS FACE' TOWARDS JERUSALEM;
HE WAS DETERMINED TO CONFRONT JERUSALEM.

Inspired by Luke 13:31-35

ON ONE OCCASION, SOME PHARISEES CAME TO HIM AND SAID,
"GO ON AND GET OUT OF HERE!"
"HEROD WANTS TO KILL YOU!"

AND JESUS SAID TO THEM,
"YOU GET OUT OF HERE!
TELL THAT SNAKE IN THE GRASS:
WATCH OUT!
I WILL GO ON CASTING OUT DEVILS
AND PERFORMING HEALINGS TODAY, TOMORROW,
AND THE DAY AFTER THAT I'LL BE DONE...

[aside] NEVERTHELESS,
I MUST BE ON MY WAY TODAY AND TOMORROW,
BECAUSE IT WOULDN'T BE RIGHT
FOR A PROPHET TO BE KILLED
WITHOUT REACHING JERUSALEM.
O JERUSALEM! JERUSALEM!
KILLING THE PROPHETS
AND PUNISHING THOSE WHO WERE SENT TO YOU!
HOW OFTEN HAVE I WISHED TO GATHER YOU AS MY CHILDREN
JUST AS A MOTHER HEN GATHERS
HER BROOD TO HERSELF UNDER THE WING?
BUT YOU REFUSE TO COME.
LOOK HERE!
YOUR HOUSE HAS BEEN ROBBED!
AND I SAY TO YOU, YOU WON'T RECOGNIZE ME
UNTIL THE TIME COMES WHEN YOU SAY,
'PRAISE TO THE ONE WHO IS COMING
ON BEHALF OF THE ONE WHO IS GOD!"