

"Where Are You Going?"

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Revelation 21:1-17

John 13:31-36

Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?"

*Jesus answered, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now;
but you shall follow afterward."*

John 13:36

Let us pray... O God,

Where are you going?

Can you take us with you?

Though the road unfolds beyond what we can see,

we trust you to provide help along the way and bring us to a good destination.

Amen

There is a beautiful folksong from the musical "Godspell" called, "By My Side" that begins like this:

Where are you going? Where are you going?

Can you take me with you? For my hand is cold,

And needs warmth. Where are you going?

Far beyond where the horizon lies, where the horizon lies.

And the land sinks into a mellow blueness,

Oh, please take me with you.

Let me skip the road with you,

I can dare myself. I can dare myself...

In "Godspell", this is the song of the woman

whom Jesus defended from being stoned for adultery.

It is her song of gratitude implied by her desire to stay with Jesus

who stood up for her in her hour of distress.

But in a broader sense it is about the yearning for God

"no matter who we are or where we are" on the journey of faith.

This song spoke to me at a time when I was feeling stuck in life

and needing to expand my horizons.

I first heard it on an 8-track cassette in my car and I loved listening to this part,

playing it over and over.

The only problem was... the rest song. It takes a bizarre turn that goes like this...

I'll put a pebble in my shoe, and watch me walk.

I can walk, I can walk.

I shall call the pebble dare. (I shall call the pebble dare)

We will talk together, about walking. Dare shall be carried

And when we both have had enough,

I will take him from my shoe singing, "Meet your new road"...

Willard, p.2

So what does that mean? Now, it was the early 1970s, so maybe we should ask –
to put it in the vernacular, ‘what were they smoking’
to come up with those lyrics?

Well, the answer is, “I don’t know” –
though these lyrics seem to suggest an earlier era of Christian devotion
like when people wore hair shirts and flagellated themselves
to show they were really remorseful for their sins.

I don’t know, but I love the song anyway.

“Godspell” first came out along with “Jesus Christ Superstar” in 1971
and they were popular Christian rock operas on Broadway
that signaled a time when Christ was cool with mainstream media.
However, the ‘70s were not like the ‘50s when there were many Biblical movie epics
like “Ben Hur” and “The Greatest Story Ever Told”.
Still these two musicals indicated a kind of acceptance of the human side of Christ –
while stopping short of telling about the Resurrection.

Jesus is about love and forgiveness. He healed people who were sick or oppressed.
He spoke to women and took them seriously at a time when society did not.
He taught wisdom to everyday people and spoke truth to power.
He bravely faced the ill will of those powers and was killed for it.
Jesus was about God and he told people about the Kingdom of God
‘on Earth as it is in Heaven...’
So, where did he go? Where did you go, Jesus? Where are we going?
Well, there’s more to the story...

Growing up in the 1960s, it seemed like the world was coming to an end
and that society was unraveling, much like it must seem to young people today
and as it may seem for some of you as well.
In the early 1970s, it was through the Church that I found a sense of optimism
about what could be.
Now this was not so much because of the religious structure of the Church,
though I began to learn more about that.
I was not involved in either the anti-War movement or directly with Civil Rights,
but I yearned for a vision of community I supposed I received
by a kind of spiritual “osmosis”.
I wanted to believe such a social transformation was possible at all levels
through the active engagement with diverse communities,
especially by deliberately crossing the chasms of prejudice and fear.

Willard, p.3

Going into the military gave me an opportunity to experience the challenges and practical triumphs of getting various ethnic and gender-specific people to work together.

We can be proud of all branches of our military for transcending cultural differences and racism to form effective *combat* units.

I was told long ago that the Army was a 'social test-tube' – not by design, but by necessity.

The military has also been an important option for minorities as a 'way out' of poverty.

Military training and service allow for individuals to have a career, gain skills and experience that can be used in civilian life, and lead to economic independence.

From lessons learned of working with recruits from a diverse population, our military was able to turn that into a strength in the Iraq War when in 2006, our military reached out to former enemies to form a coalition.

30 Sunni tribal militias – which had been our enemies, were welcomed to partner together to form a coalition called the 'Anbar Awakening'.

Together with a 'surge' of 20,000 American troops, al-Qaeda was effectively defeated in Iraq by the following year.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anbar_Awakening

The goal of any military unit is to train and operate together as a team to defeat an enemy – by destroying them.

As the anti-War slogan of the Vietnam era goes:

"Join the Army, travel the world, meet interesting people and kill them".

http://www.barrypopik.com/index.php/new_york_city/entry/join_the_army_travel_the_world_meet_in_teresting_people_and_kill_them/

Can the same principles of military comradeship be translated to achieve the goal of defeating enemies... non-violently – even transforming them into friends?

So, as in the case of the Anbar Awakening, it is not too late even when combatants have been actively engaged in fighting, to become allies, but what can be done before entering the arena of violence?

I believe coalitions leading to that vision of God's Kingdom as a Beloved Community are entirely possible – not as something that any of us could *expect* in our lifetimes, yet worth fighting for, striving for, creating for, now.

I remember reading about someone's observation about the crowd which had gathered before the Lincoln Memorial in the summer of 1963 during the March on Washington, DC 'for Jobs and Freedom'.

It was actually as they were dispersing that this observer became aware of the diversity of that multitude of people, giving the impression of what could be – the Kingdom of God as a social reality of mutuality, respect, and co-operation.

Willard, p.4

Our scripture lesson from Revelation 21:1-2 speaks of a time and place,
beyond earthly time and geographical space, where it is written...

*¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth,
for the former heaven and the former earth had passed away,
and the sea was no more.*

*²I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,
made ready as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*

This imagery supports that of Matthew 25:34^b

when Christ comes to judge the world and says to those who are in the right:
*'Come, you that are blessed by my [Abba] Father,
inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'*

This 'kingdom' has been part of God's design all along,
'from the foundation of the world', since the Beginning
up until that 'New Jerusalem' appears in 'glory'.

That's where we are going – even if we never physically get there.

In his last speech, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said,

*I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain.
And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land.
I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight,
that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land...*

which Dr. King also called the Beloved Community.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I%27ve_Been_to_the_Mountaintop

I have had glimpses of it myself through the activities of our church,
with our weekly worship and special observances and celebrations,
our fellowship, and our day to day maintenance and administration.

There have also been broad vistas of what can be
including our educational events and mission outreach,.

Our participation in interfaith adventures include
the Passover Seder & Maundy Thursday service held here,
a recent interfaith 'Prayer Service for Peace'
at St Timothy Catholic Church, and this passed Friday night at Temple Shalom
where I was a guest for their congregation's Passover Seder Meal.

Where are you going, Jesus?

Friends, where are we going? as a world? as a church? as individuals?

What can yet be is that we go *'Far beyond where the horizon lies...'*

Willard, p.5

It's a ways off yet, but we don't go it alone. We don't make that trip alone.

Glory is our destination and we find grace along the way to keep us on the path,
because God through Christ went ahead of us – and is still with us.

The “Godspell” song concludes like this...

Then I'll take your hand, finally glad (finally glad)

That you are here (that you are here)

By my side, by my side, by my side.

http://www.allthelyrics.com/lyrics/godspell/by_my_side-lyrics-466799.html#ixzz46EUAUR00

Amen

Our lesson from Revelation 21:1-17 includes the vision of a new Jerusalem as the City of God that is revealed with the culmination of human history and the transformation of Creation...

[The Apostle John said,]

- ¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth,
for the former heaven and the former earth had passed away,
and the sea was no more.
- ²I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,
made ready as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.
- ³I heard a loud voice from the throne say,
“Look! God’s dwelling is here with humankind.
[God] will dwell with them, and they will be his peoples.
God himself will be with them as their God.
- ⁴[God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more.
There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore,
for the former things have passed away.”
- ⁵Then the one seated on the throne said,
“Look! I’m making all things new.” He also said,
“Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”
- ⁶Then he said to me,
“All is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.
To the thirsty I will freely give water from the life-giving spring.
- ⁷Those who emerge victorious will inherit these things.
I will be their God, and they will be my sons and daughters.
- ⁸But for the cowardly, the faithless, the vile, the murderers,
those who commit sexual immorality,
those who use drugs and cast spells, the idolaters and all liars –
their share will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur.
This is the second death.”
- ⁹Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls
full of the seven last plagues spoke with me.
“Come,” he said,
“I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.”
- ¹⁰He took me in a Spirit-inspired trance to a great, high mountain,
and he showed me the holy city, Jerusalem,
coming down out of heaven from God.
- ¹¹The city had God’s glory.
Its brilliance was like a priceless jewel, like jasper that was as clear as crystal.
- ¹²It had a great high wall with twelve gates.
By the gates were twelve angels, and on the gates were written
the names of the twelve tribes of Israel’s sons.

- ¹³ There were three gates on the east, three gates on the north,
three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.
- ¹⁴ The city wall had twelve foundations,
and on them were the twelve names of the Lamb's twelve apostles.
- ¹⁵ The angel who spoke to me had a gold measuring rod
with which to measure the city, its gates, and its wall.
- ¹⁶ Now the city was laid out as a square. Its length was the same as its width.
He measured the city with the rod, and it was fifteen hundred miles.
Its length and width and height were equal.
- ¹⁷ He also measured the thickness of its wall.
It was two hundred sixteen feet thick, as a person - or rather, an angel -
measures things.

Let us be challenged and guided by these words...

John 13:31-36

31 When [Judas] had gone out, Jesus said,

“Now is the Son of man glorified,
and in him God is glorified;

32 if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself,
and glorify him at once.

33 Little children, yet a little while I am with you.

You will seek me; and as I said to the [Judeans] so now I say to you,
‘Where I am going you cannot come.’

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another;
even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

35 By this all [people] will know that you are my disciples,
if you have love for one another.”

36 Simon Peter said to him,

“Lord, where are you going?”

Jesus answered,

“Where I am going you cannot follow me now;
but you shall follow afterward.”