

## **A Lenten Journey: Know Where You Are Going** **Rev. Dennis Kelly**

So this is Week Two of our Lenten Journey. If this is a journey, then consider me to be your tour guide. Today's tools for the journey are here in my backpack.

Last week, I shared with you that this journey has three dimensions.

- It is a **liturgical journey** that takes us from one cross to another – from the Ash Wednesday to Palm Sunday.
- It is a **scriptural journey** as read stories that allow us to follow Jesus from the wilderness to the garden.
- It is a **spiritual journey** that challenges us to move from our false selves to our true real selves and in the process enter into a renewed relationship with Jesus Christ.

The overall theme for this journey is **Living Lent as People of the Resurrection**. We began that theme on Ash Wednesday as we were invited to **ponder** our journey and our constant need to renew our hearts and turn them back to God. Last Sunday we were invited to focus on our **purpose**. Jesus knew his purpose even in the midst of the three temptations he faced in the wilderness. On Wednesday evening we were invited to reflect upon our own purpose – what it is that God want us to be.

This week we are invited to continue our journey knowing that we do not journey alone. There are people all around us. There are those who help us in this journey. There are people who we help in their journeys. And there are always people who make our journeys more difficult or try to lead us down the wrong path. That is why we need to be clear about where we are going.

In today's Gospel lesson, 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.*" These words indicate that Jesus shows us 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 God's spokesperson often met the strongest resistance to God's word. 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.

Thanks be to God! AMEN!