

“To Jerusalem”  
Luke 9:51-62  
1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent

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Westminster, Greenville  
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One of my favorite photographs of the Civil Rights movement is a picture that was taken during the march from Selma to Montgomery in 1965.

Like so many other pictures taken during the movement, Martin Luther King, Jr., is front and center. His right arm is locked to the arm of the marcher to his right, his left hand is holding the hand of his wife, Coretta Scott King.

What’s different about this photo is where everyone who’s around King...is looking.

King is looking straight ahead.  
But almost everyone else, at the moment the photograph is taken—  
they’re looking someplace else.

The photo was taken an instant after a LOUD NOISE was heard.  
Was it a car backfiring?  
Was it a bomb going off?

Nobody knew.

So heads are turned.  
Eyes are searching.  
Where is it? What was that?  
All except for King.

King looks like he doesn’t care about the noise.  
His head isn’t turned.  
His eyes are forward.  
He looks as determined as ever.

He looks like someone who will let NOTHING—  
 not even a potential threat to his life—  
 get in the way of what he needs to do...

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It's a great photo.  
 If you have time after worship, see if you can find it.

But I mention that photo because I wonder...  
**I wonder if you can see that same look—**  
 on the face of Jesus this morning.

In the text we just heard, Luke writes that Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

And he must have had a look,  
 the look of someone who will let nothing slow him down,  
 who will let nothing get in the way of what he needs to do.

According to Luke, Jesus sends messengers ahead to a town in Samaria.

Why won't the Samaritans receive Jesus?  
 Because, Luke says, “...his face was set toward Jerusalem.”  
 It sounds like Jesus had a look!

Other potential followers of Jesus—they approach Jesus.

To one, Jesus said, “*Follow me.*”  
*But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”*  
*Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead...”*

*Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home."*

*Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*

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I think Jesus had a look.  
Can you see the look on Jesus' face?  
He's not waiting for anybody today.

No excuse will deter him.  
No noise will distract him.

**You see, according to Jesus, it's time to go to Jerusalem today.  
And what Jesus wants to know is whether you and I are ready  
to join him.**

**What do you think?  
Would you like to go to Jerusalem with Jesus?**

If we wish, you and I can start the journey today.  
Because today is the first Sunday in Lent.

This 40-day season that takes us right up to Easter, when there will be lilies up front and brass in the back and 700 other voices in this sanctuary singing "Jesus Christ is Risen Today!"

I mean, I look forward to Easter.  
Besides the lilies and the brass, we get donuts at Easter.

How many children here think that donuts are the best part of Easter?

How many adults think that donuts are the best—don't answer that.

But before we get to Easter, we've got to go to Jerusalem.  
Jesus is clear about that. You can see it on his face.  
There is no Easter without Jerusalem.

Now I know...some of you have plans to go on the pilgrimage to Scotland, and you're leaving later this week. I hope you have a wonderful trip. You have the prayers of this congregation for safe travel and safe return.

But please note...the two trips are **not** mutually exclusive.  
You can go to Scotland.  
And you can still make the trip to Jerusalem with Jesus.

The late preacher William Sloane Coffin once described Lent as the season when we move, with Jesus, from Galilee to Jerusalem.

**Make no mistake.**  
**It's not an easy trip.**

After all, we all know what happens in Jerusalem.  
The arrest. The torture.  
The execution. The death.

It's not an easy journey.  
Nor is it an easy-to-understand journey.

Why go to Jerusalem?

After all, Jesus didn't have to do it.  
He could have stayed in Galilee.

Have you ever considered that?  
Galilee is where Jesus' ministry was going really well.

He taught with eloquent parables in Galilee.  
Crowds flocked to Jesus in Galilee.  
The hungry were fed.  
The sick were healed.  
Demons were cast out...all this happens in Galilee.

No wonder the disciples were dumbfounded when Jesus told them it was time to go to Jerusalem. Jesus—what's all this talk about Jerusalem?

That's where the powers that be are, Jesus.  
That's where the Romans are, Jesus!

But Jesus tells them he has to do it.  
One of those times goes like this:

“Then he took the twelve aside, and said to them, ‘See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be handed over to the Gentiles; and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon. After they have flogged him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise again.’

Luke writes: “...they understood nothing...  
they did not grasp what was said.”

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So, the invitation is out there, extended to you—  
**Jesus is leaving today.**

## **Would you like to go with Jesus to Jerusalem?**

As you already heard, there are plenty who didn't make the journey. Some said no, some had excuses, some had other important things to do.

Do you have more important things to do today?

**Look, if you're having trouble deciding  
whether or not to go with Jesus to Jerusalem...  
you're in good company.**

According to Luke, the first disciples struggled with it.  
According to Luke, even Jesus struggled with it.

Pause.

Do you remember the first text for today?

When Jesus is tempted by the devil in the wilderness?

That happened at the very beginning of his ministry, before his good work in Galilee.

And Luke ends the passage with this intriguing verse:  
"When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time."

But Luke never circles back to tell us when that was!  
Maybe it's when Satan enters the heart of Judas to betray Jesus.  
Or maybe it's in the Garden.  
Maybe it's in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus had second thoughts about making the trip to Jerusalem.

Luke describes the scene this way:

“Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.”

“Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.”

In his anguish!

Even Jesus was struggling, wondering if he did the right thing when he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

Take another look at the face of Jesus, when he turned to go to Jerusalem.

Can you see his face?

Not just the determination that we mentioned at the beginning.

Can you see the sadness?

I think there’s some sadness on the face of Jesus...

Because Luke is quite clear.

There was a part of Jesus—perhaps a very large part of Jesus—  
that did not want his life to end!

Which brings us back to Lent.

What do we say on Ash Wednesday, at the start of Lent?

“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Lent isn’t just about the end of Jesus’ life.

Lent invites us to consider the endings **in our lives**.

How we deal with them.

What we expect out of them.

Are any of you facing an ending in your life right now?

Perhaps a loved one is sick.

Maybe retirement is around the corner.

Maybe the person you loved for many years is no longer with you.

I don't know what ending is staring you in the face at this moment.

I do know that whatever ending that you fear—

that ending is the very reason

Jesus has invited you to join him on his journey.

You see, Jesus wants you to know that whatever ending you are facing, it's not the end of his relationship with you. It's not the end of God's love for you.

God has something in store for you, something that's impossible to see at this moment, with the naked eye.

To borrow the words of the English poet, William Blake:

“This life's dim windows of the soul  
Distorts the heavens from pole to pole  
And leads you to believe a lie  
When you see with, not through, the eye.”<sup>1</sup>

So take a third look at Jesus' face.

He set his face to go to Jerusalem.

What do you see on his face?

I hope you see...not just the sadness,

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to a sermon by the Rev. Dr. Jared E. Alcantara, “Desolate and Beautiful,” for making me aware of this quote from Blake, found at [Desolate and Beautiful - Episode #4172 | Day 1](#).



not only the determination—

I hope you see the hope.  
Do you see the hope?

Because Jerusalem isn't just about endings.  
According to Luke, it's also about new beginnings.  
It's about hope.

Do you remember how Luke describes it, that first Easter?

When the risen Christ appeared to the eleven, and ate a piece of fish with them, and he opened their minds to understand what had happened to him?

Where were they, when that happened?

In Matthew and Mark, the risen Christ first appears to the disciples in Galilee. But according to Luke, the risen Christ appears to the eleven in Jerusalem.

Or maybe you recall where the Church was born?  
When tongues, like fire, rested on each of the soon-to-be apostles?

Where did the Holy Spirit get everything started, so that you could be worshipping God in this church, with these people, here today?

It was in Jerusalem...

**And today...today you and I are invited to go there with Jesus.**

I know I said at the beginning that if you have time after worship to look for that picture of Martin Luther King, Jr., you ought to do it.

It's a good picture.

I'm just not sure you and I have time to do it.

You see, Jesus is leaving for Jerusalem after worship today.  
And he's got a sense of urgency about him.

It's not going to be an easy trip.  
It's a trip that will involve some letting go...  
and dealing with endings in our lives...

But it's also a journey filled with the hope of God.  
Because God's love has something in store for you that you cannot  
imagine right now.

Do you have things to do over the next over the next 6 weeks?  
I imagine you do.

Do you have anything more important to do than go with Jesus to  
Jerusalem?

(Amen.)