

Sermon for March 13, 2022 by The Rev. Lydia Gajdel
Second Sunday in Lent Year C
St. Paul and the Redeemer Episcopal Church – Chicago, Illinois

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Mother of us all.

I recently fell down a deep rabbit hole. One of my favorite true crime podcasts, basically the only kind of podcast that I listen to, covered a case where a crime scene was discovered by a group of teenagers using an app called Randonautica. This app randomly generates a set of coordinates and sends you on a journey to discover somewhere new. You put in the distance you want to travel, set an intention for your journey, and it spits back out a set of numbers that will bring you to a random destination you never knew existed. This is where I tripped and fell down the rabbit hole. Adventure for the sake of adventure. Journey for the sake of possibility. People using technology to step outside of their comfort zones and travel into the unknown. And there are stories of some weird things happening in this unknown. People have come across underground mansions with tiny doors in the side of a hill, found graffiti with their full names on it, and happened upon giant statues in the middle of empty fields. Hours of my life were spent in the recesses of the internet reading the stories of the adventures of strangers. (I highly recommend you google this.)

The draw towards these stories of traversing the unknown comes from the fact that journeys are an inescapable part of the human experience. Our lives are marked by motion and change. Always moving through the current moment and towards what is next. The reality of our wandering nature has even been codified in popular culture through the archetypal story pattern of the hero's journey, entertainment mirroring reality. While we all sometimes desire to teleport from point to point, skipping over the less desirable moments, the journey as a whole, beginning, middle, and end, is inevitable, key to our existence.

On this second Sunday in Lent, we find Jesus in the midst of his own journey. A journey with a purpose and a drive that, especially in the Lukan depiction, marks us as fellow travelers on the way. Jesus begins the trek towards Jerusalem in Luke 9:51 with the express purpose of living out his fated death and resurrection. Over the next ten chapters, one of which where we get our reading from today, it becomes clear that Jesus's mission is two-fold: ministry and care for God's people that are met along the way and the eventual death and resurrection that seals our salvation, both intertwined and essential to living out Christ's call.

And over and over and over again we are reminded that this journey was never meant to be easy. Jesus continues to name out loud that he is here for the salvation of God's people. Period. Hard stop. Even and especially when God's people don't get it or act against it.

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

He seems to be saying, You guys keep doing the wrong things and all I want to do is put my arms around you and protect you and yet here we are. You don't get it and I love you and you're frustrating. An exasperated Jesus if we ever saw him. And yet, he continues towards his eventual death and resurrection for our sake. Eye rolls and all.

We all understand the challenges that mark every journey. The roadblocks and pitfalls that thwart a noble quest. But part of what we learn today is that the journey isn't important *despite* the hard things. It is the complexity that makes it worth it. It is imperative that Jesus's journey to Jerusalem include the joys of ministry and relationship with God's people alongside the trauma of death and the joy of resurrection. You can't separate out the perceived good and bad and still get to the same place. It is an amalgam for a reason.

In these Lenten days, we journey alongside our God towards resurrection and new life, knowing full well that this is one journey among many. As we live at full speed, we as humans are constantly learning, growing, changing, being shaped by the motion of our lives. But often times, we have far less clarity about the purpose than Jesus does. Very few of us have had the clouds part and a booming voice tell us exactly who we are and what we are on this earth to accomplish. And yet we journey still. Praying and hoping that we are headed in the terminal direction of the Good. All of these journeys that mold us into who we are and who we will become invite us on an adventure that will ultimately lead us closer to God. The beautiful, the heartbreaking, and everything in between come together in all of their complexity and murkiness to create us. Fearfully and wonderfully made in God's image.

My dad has a perennial refrain every time life gets the better of him. "I knew the most I've ever known when I was 21" he says with a head shake. Meaning, as he pays attention to the journey of his life the more he changes, the more he learns, and the more complex it all seems to become. But that is what it means to be human. We live our lives every day in the face of transformation, moving along the road towards a destination, known or unknown. We can't escape it. But we can trust in the reality that we are not on the journey alone. That we have a God who travels alongside us, knowing the purpose and navigating the complexity. Reminding us of and shaping us into the ultimate Good for which we were created.

Amen.