

“Jesus International Airport” (27Feb22)  
Luke 9:27-43a; Exodus 34:29-35;  
2Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Picture the glow of airports. The flashing green and red through clouds, the landing lights of planes coming and going. Strobing runway lights. The taxiing and colored wands of an air traffic controller. Blinking of screens updating flight schedules. Maybe the shine of a lonely overhead reading light.

Now picture the glow of a lonely Jesus, the flashing strobe of him suddenly shining brightly, then back to normal. Picture this flash of him, through the cloud, coming and going.

We overhear Jesus discussing his departure from Jerusalem, like he’s about to make a glowing liftoff from the mountaintop, ascending through the clouds, with Moses and Elijah serving as travel agents for the final arrangements, talking flight schedules and how long it takes to get through security and whether Jesus prefers the window seat or the aisle. (For those who’ve traveled to the Holy Land, you might point out that Jesus wouldn’t depart by airplane from Jerusalem; he’d probably go down to Tel Aviv and fly out of Ben Gurion.)

So what (really) is this stuff about his departure in this strange reading? In the original Greek, this word for departure is a familiar one, and has a much less familiar counterpart. I did some research, wishing for these to be the Greek words for departures and arrivals used at airports. But that’s a different set of terms—if I’ve deciphered the maps of the Athens airport.

Still, this is a Greek word you probably know. Departure here is “exodus.” If the word is familiar, it’s probably not for Jesus having an exodus. You probably associate it more with the setting of our first reading, from a book given the name Exodus, the story of God’s people going out from Egypt toward the Promised Land, following Moses—or guided mostly by God, who leads with the commandments and is a beacon as a pillar of cloud and fire through the wilderness.

We call the book Exodus because it’s about a departure. Or, to break the word into its roots, it’s the story of the road out—ex-odus. For the Israelites in the story, it was the road out of Egypt, leaving from slavery under Pharaoh. As they were departing enslavement, they were traveling toward liberation. That was their destination to arrive at. They had an exodus—a road out—and, for the counterpart Greek term, also an eisodus: a road toward freedom.

We might see more than the Israelites with a paired exodus from slavery and eisodus toward liberation; a recent article in the *Christian Century*\* observed that the Egyptians themselves were also freed from the bonds of being slaveholders. As they offered payment to the departing Israelites—perhaps a form of reparations—they themselves were set free from a captivity. The legacy of slaveholders needs liberation, just as former slaves move toward it. The article points out that this is true not only in an ancient Bible story: in America we also continue on the road out of slavery’s past and still are making our collective way into full freedom.

For a different take on the pairing of terms, and more directly connected to today’s first reading, another sort of departure and arrival—exodus and eisodus—could be with the commandments on Mount Sinai, of God leading the people out of an old way of life and offering guideposts into a new way. Again, particularly as we approach the renewal of the season of Lent, you may ponder what in your life God is calling and leading you out from—where is your exodus—and what godly ways are you arriving toward?

There’s a little of that in the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading, as well. It says we see the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image. We were created in the image of God, and maybe this is finding our way back to that, a round trip leading home, or finding its fulfillment.

In the course of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, it also means that our value isn’t determined in ourselves, in how well we perform, or how much or little we suffer,

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\* <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/critical-essay/book-exodus-includes-story-about-reparations-slavery>

not in any self-definitions and competitions. You are being transformed—maybe we'd say transported—out of your old self to arrive at God's glorious intentions, new self, new creation.

Perhaps there's also parallel exodus and eisodus in the second part of the Gospel reading, after coming down from the mountain. As Jesus meets a boy who has been suffering and whose life isn't what it should be, we could say that Jesus leads him out of illness and into wellbeing. Even more is the exodus from being a faithless and perverse generation with an eisodus of incoming faith—we disciples who still don't understand, even though we've been traveling with Jesus.

That notion of *traveling with* Jesus may finally point us toward the main thing when he's talking about his departure. There's another familiar Greek word for "traveling with:" synod. Syn-od is a road together. Usually we use the word synod as Lutherans for an affiliated group of churches, like the Missouri Synod or the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin. We are on the road together.

But much more centrally, Jesus is on the road together with us. His eisodus was to synod so that we could join his exodus. To say that in English instead of Greek: Jesus arrived to share the road with us, so that he could lead us to where he's going. Jesus came into our lives—into our suffering and confusion and sorrows—in order to lead us out of those and into liberation and faith and joy.

The departure, finally, that he's going to accomplish at Jerusalem is cross and resurrection, departing from life and journeying through death. He does that so he can lead us out from enmity to reconciliation, from war to peace, out of brokenness to wholeness, out of shame to glory, out of sin to blessedness, out of all that confines us into freedom, from death into life.

Jesus is now boarding. Bon voyage.