

Sermon
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March 6, 2019
Ash Wednesday
Luke 9:51-62

ReSet, ReLent, ReNew: The Where and How of the Journey

May the words spoken, and the words received, be only in your service, great God of Love. Amen.

Jesus is quite clear. His destination is Jerusalem—the religious, cultural, and political center of his people. Jerusalem—the place that would become the site of his betrayal, execution, and resurrection. Jesus understands the where and what of his journey. His disciples, not so much.

Even with all the evidence that seems to stack up about Jesus' messiahship, and their own confessions of faith, they are thick-headed and still don't understand. But perhaps it was exactly their mounting trust in his messiahship that had them confused. They expect that God's messiah, come to save, is powerful. It makes no sense that God's messiah is, or even could be, humiliated at the hands of humans.

Even though his disciples' aren't fully on board, Jesus "sets" his face toward confrontation with empire. He knows where he's going and for what purpose. His disciples follow along, but their understanding of the journey needs to be ReSet . . . again and again. Case in point, in today's scripture, as they travel along the way Jesus and the disciples enter a Samaritan village. Not surprisingly, the aren't welcomed. The Samaritans and the Jews shared a long-standing hostility for complex reasons. The disciples are ready to huff and to puff and to blow the place down because of the rejection.

"Dudes, chill!" Jesus says, "You've missed the whole point of this journey. I'm not on a path to destroy. We'll just move on to another town."

While Jesus has a clear destination with a clear purpose in mind, the journey to Jerusalem for the disciples seems to be much more about *how* they get where they're going. One scholar phrases it this way: "As with the journeying of Israel of old, here in Luke's Gospel we find a 'wandering' that is often more about the formation of God's people than about arriving at a destination. This major section of the Gospel is devoted overwhelmingly to . . . intensive disciple-training. . ."¹

This high intensity discipleship workout commences immediately after they leave the Samaritan village. The disciples are amped up. "I will follow you wherever you go, Jesus!" they boast.

It must have seemed so easy. To follow the man who attracted adulating crowds in the Jewish towns and hillsides, the one who could say just a word and demons were defeated and bodies healed.

But Jesus knows the difficulty of the journey. He knows the cross that lies before him because it is the nature of empire to resist, with every weapon in its arsenal, the empowerment of the oppressed. But the disciples don't yet understand what it will take to walk with him, to confront empire as he does, to risk it all for the sake of the realm of God, the Beloved

¹ The New Interpreters Study Bible, p 1872

Community.

“If you want to follow me,” Jesus tells them, “You must ReLent from anything that holds you back. Anyone who says they want to follow me but finds more pressing business to attend to has failed to understand the kingdom of God.”

Our text shows the disciples hesitating in very understandable ways. “I’m all in, Jesus, but first I need to go home to say good-bye,” and “Hey, man, I’ll catch up with you, just as soon as I bury my father.” It’s hard to find fault with them on the face of it. And yet, what’s illustrated is their conditional nature to following Jesus.

If the story were written today, how might it be told? Maybe, “Say, Jesus, I will follow you wherever you go, but I just need to make sure I can make my full contribution to my 401k first.” Or perhaps, “Let’s do this, Jesus! Why don’t you have your people call my people and see when we can get it on the calendar.” Or even, “I’m with you, Jesus, about walking in solidarity with the oppressed, but maybe I’ll catch you when you stop talking so much about injustice. You know, that just makes me feel uncomfortable.”

Following the way of Jesus means to follow after the way of God, expressed in the tangible flesh of humanity. The way of God is a path of Love to ReNew the whole of creation. Jesus followed this Love to Jerusalem, and the disciples followed Jesus—in their own meandering and sometimes utterly clueless ways—to learn the way of Love.

We practice our own journey Lent: practice re-setting our intentions to go where Jesus is leading, and re-lenting from that which blocks our way. Along the path, we’re promised renewal. We, unlike the first disciples, know the way the story turns out. God’s expansive Love ensures that Jesus’ ultimate destination is well beyond the executioner’s cross and the stone-sealed grave to life that has no enemy, not even death.

ReSet, ReLent, ReNew. May these be our gifts this season.

Amen.