

The Journey: "Into Jerusalem"

Palms Homily

[Genesis 12:1-7](#)

[Luke 19:28-38](#)

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We all know about ups and downs in relationships, times when we are close, and times when we are very distant. Our relationship with God is like that too. In Genesis, first Adam and Eve are created in God's image—at one with God—but then God curses them when they disobey, and banishes them. Next God curses humanity for its sinfulness and causes the flood, yet tries again to be at one with humankind, by creating a covenant with Noah and by blessing him. Next comes Abraham to whom God promises blessing if he will leave his home and depart into the unknown. "Go from your country and your kindred..." God says (Genesis 12:1). Leave it all behind!

We can think of Abraham—called Abram at this point in the story—as the epitome of faithfulness, willing to follow God from the land of the Rivers Tigris and Euphrates to Canaan. The Egyptians called Canaan "that poor country dependent on rain" (Feiler, 42). Romans and Greeks later called it Palestina. And today, those who are concerned for the rights and wellbeing of both Israelis and Palestinians call the country Israel-Palestine. It is a land squeezed between empires, dry, and economically and politically fragile. Abraham, like Joseph's family later, had to leave Canaan when there was a famine. It is a rocky, hilly, and dry land.

In 2013 I was in the Negev desert where Abraham would have journeyed. My group visited in the modest home of a Bedouin family. The village was on the list to be demolished by the Israeli government. Although the village is in Israel, the family had to buy its own generator to bring electricity to the village. The Palestinians could not attend the Israeli school nearby. Life was very hard. The man who spoke with us was a teacher with a university degree. His brother was a nomadic herder. Some of his herd was there in a pen in that village of three or four families. As we walked around the dilapidated buildings, we heard the Islamic call to prayer from a radio. The men paused to pray to Allah, facing Mecca, in the direction from which Abraham would have come. Of course, Judaism preceded Islam, and this ancient life style of herding sheep and goats was the life Abraham, well before Islam had come to this part of the world. Abraham's journey took him a long way, and when he arrived, the "Promised Land" was dry and barren, not "a land of milk and honey."

Abraham was the first to follow the call of one God, who did not reside on a mountain, or in a tree, or in a figurine. God demonstrates through Abraham that faith in God requires no temple, no holy city, and no secure place of worship. In fact, this invisible God leads Abraham into insecurity. He has no idea what will come of him. He has no children to care for him. How could he believe such a journey would be fruitful? All he had was the

promise that God would be with him wherever he went. His journey is the universal life journey that by faith God walks with us into the unknown.

The journey of Jesus is also a journey by faith into the unknown. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was also the God of Jesus.

The Palm Sunday story is told in all four Gospels, but differently. In Luke, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem follows a parable alluding to the hated son of Herod, Archelaus, marching into Rome. In contrast, Jesus enters the city on a lowly colt. In Mark, Matthew, and Luke, the passage comes just before the conflict in the Temple when Jesus says, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations. But you have made it a den of robbers" (Mark 11:17, Matthew 21:13, Luke 19:46). And in John, Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem follows the anointing by Mary that prepares Jesus for his death. This is a rocky time on the journey into Jerusalem.

Jesus journeys from Jericho to Bethany to Jerusalem, entering the city from the East over the Mount of Olives, where Jews anticipate the resurrection of the dead, close to where Jesus was likely buried. Four years ago, as I stood on the ancient stone path, just outside the old city, I imagined that the diverse people of all faiths and cultures around me were followers of Jesus, waving palm branches and crying out "Hosanna," which means "Save us." I thought about the political tensions in Jesus' day, and I thought about the political tensions in the Holy Land today.

Jesus was following the call from God that led him into Jerusalem, come what may. The people had no idea what to expect, but they hoped that he would save them from poverty and oppression. They watched him as he followed the only road to Easter morning.

The Journey: "To the Cross"
 Passion Homily
[John 19:15-30, 38-42](#)

We cannot go from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday, without the sorrow that comes between these two days of celebration. For after Jesus entered the city on a colt with the crowd shouting joyful praises to God, Jesus met with his disciples for his Last Supper; Judas, one of the twelve, betrayed him; the Roman soldiers arrested him; Pilate, the Roman Governor of Judea, handed him over to be crucified; and his followers laid him in a tomb. It was the only road to Easter morning.

The whole story of Jesus' life is a journey to Jerusalem and to the cross. Jesus was always on the road—from Nazareth, to Capernaum, to Jericho, to Jerusalem; healing, reaching out to outsiders, teaching about the God of Abraham, and following the law to love the one invisible God with heart, soul, and might, and to care for God's people that they might continue to receive God's blessing. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9).

Jesus came from God, from the lineage of Abraham to bring peace. Abraham received God's call to follow, as did many who came after him. These were all unlikely people. Abraham was a wandering herdsman; Jacob was a scheming liar; David was a young shepherd boy; Mary was a teenage girl from an insignificant village; and Jesus was a baby born in a stable. God called each one out of ordinary existence to do something extraordinary.

That call comes to us also. It comes in a moment of crisis in our lives when we may even question the existence of God or in a spiritual moment of personal closeness to God. It feels like a door opening onto a new path. We don't know quite what the path will lead to, but the direction seems to have purpose.

The journey God leads us on may be lonely at times. But as Jesus came to the end of his earthly journey, he spoke to us from the cross. He looked at the people there, and saw his mother, who was weeping. Then he did something for her. He said, "'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home" (John 19:26-27). Jesus connected the people dearest to him to each other. He gave them the message that we understand God's love to be constant even on a rocky road of life. Even when we do not know what it means to get up and go to Canaan or get up and go to Jerusalem, we know that we will not walk alone. And even when our destiny is death, and we see that life is finished, it is not finished. We live on with God and in the memory of our loved ones. Even from the cross, Jesus tells his mother and his beloved friend to get up and to continue to love one another and follow God.

The journey of life is never over. God calls us to get up and care for one another. God calls us to embody the love that God has for us, for "you will be a blessing," God promises to every generation and to every person here today.