



Sermon 1 (March 18, 2012): Setting Out for Jerusalem

Background:

Building upon what we have learnt together from Exodus, about God honouring His covenant promise and leading His people into freedom and new life, we now turn to Jesus and how He fulfils the New Covenant and offers freedom and new life in God to all who accept Him as Lord and Saviour.

Our teaching for the coming weeks are all taken from the Gospel of Luke and it is important to remember as we read Luke's Gospel that it is the first part of a two part story. The author of Luke also wrote the Acts of the Apostles, which tell us the adventures of the early church.

Many of the events and teachings described in this section of Luke's gospel, especially those that concentrate of the parables are unique to this book. Prior to this Matthew, Mark and Luke run in parallel, but it is at this point where we join the gospel in our studies that they divert. In this section we find that Luke concentrates on the teachings of Jesus as he begins his journey to Jerusalem and inevitably his death on the cross culminating His glorious resurrection and ascension to heaven.

In the following chapters we can see how Jesus is teaching and preparing His disciples regarding spiritual matters, He is pointing out to them very clearly that their approach to spirituality would differ from that of the Jewish leaders. We see that He calls them to be faithful despite rejection, warning them that discipleship is not easy and how they must count the cost.

At the beginning of Chapter 9 (v5) Jesus points out they may be rejected or they may suffer. But thankfully alongside these challenges we can find clear promises from God's that he will hear the cries of those who suffer and grant justice to them (Luke 18:1-8).

The way of the disciple is a "new way," unlike that of the religious leadership of the day who rejected Jesus.

We will find that this together with what Jesus has done in his earlier miracles, parables and teachings is causing an ever deepening the rift between Jesus and the Jewish influential.

Many scholars call this section of Luke "the Jerusalem journey" or "The Way"

Ice-Breaker

Q) Have you ever been upset on somebody else's behalf and wanted to do something to defend them? What was the final outcome?

Study:

A) The Journey Begins: Read Luke 9:51-55

The opening of the text at verse 51 tells us that *Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*

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It starts, *as the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven*. The Imagery of Jesus' fate and destiny appears right at the start of this section. "Setting one's face" to do something is an Old Testament way of speaking about resolve, steadfastness or doggedness. (Gen 31:21; Jer 21:10; 44:12). We learn that Jesus is determined to accomplish God's will wherever it leads.

And from this Chapter, right through to Chapter 19, we are told of the journey Jesus undertook that led him right into Jerusalem. If we were to read these chapters we would see that it is not a direct route, but that Jesus traverses the area making significant visits on his way to his final fate.

The first point of call on the journey is a village in Samaria. This is the only negative story we hear about the Samaritans in relation to Jesus. As opposed to the Good Samaritan and the Samaritan woman at the well. We read that Jesus was not welcome and the reason given in the passage is *"because his face was set toward Jerusalem"*.

Q 1) Can you think of reasons why Jesus was not welcome here?

Read 1 Kings 16:21-24.

Traditionally Jews and Samaritans were hostile to one another. The Jewish people saw the Samaritans as impure in that they had married outside the faith and were ethnic traitors who even worshiped at another site Mount Gerazim (see John 4:20-24). So Jesus' effort as a Jew to reach out to them was culturally truly exceptional. It would be like ministering in a cross racial setting today. The reaction might be "What are you doing here?"

Or maybe another reason was that they could not see the seriousness of Jesus' purpose or maybe they did not want to be dragged into it all.

We are not really sure all we know is that the Samaritans did not receive Jesus, because his face was set to go to Jerusalem.

It appears that the disciples react with the wish to use their connections to Jesus and the power they have been given by Him to bring revenge on the Samaritans.

If you read verse 54 we see here that James and John ask Jesus if he wants them to bring about an ancient equivalent of destroying the enemy: *"Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?"*

The request for *"fire from above"* recalls the ministry of Elijah, possibly it reminded them of what Elijah did to the priests of the god Baal (1 Kings 18:38)

Or maybe it was in response to their witness of the Transfiguration of Jesus, as he talked to Elijah and Moses on the Mountain. (Luke 9:28-36). Perhaps they were trying to impress Jesus with their zeal for protecting His name.

Q 2) What do you think of James and John's reaction to their rejection?

Q 3) Do you think their hostile reaction justified?

Q 4) How does Jesus react to their suggestion?

Q 5) Can you give any examples of abuse of power?

Whatever the reason, we see that Jesus was not impressed, as He recognised his apostles' lack of love for their enemies. The disciples have faith in their spiritual power that God has blessed them with, but the question is whether a vindictive use of this power is proper.

This is a lesson for Christians who think that their group is the 'only' group God recognizes and blesses. God is in the business of inviting all to be saved not the elite and this time we are looking at is a time of invitation not judgment. To minister with power is exciting but we are also called to live and work under Gods grace and love, which will prove even better.

But are the issues regarding the Samaritans the main focus in these verses?

The next three encounters Jesus has with three different individuals give us a great opposing example. They shows us that while Jesus had patience with those who realise that they have trouble following him, he had much less patience with those who claim they will follow him, but end up giving excuses

B) The Demands of Discipleship: Read Luke (9:57-62)

The main theme of this of this section is the verb *follow*, and it appears in verses 57, 59 and 61.

The three cases are all different.

In one case Jesus makes the call (v. 59). In another a disciple offers to follow wherever Jesus goes with no excuses (v. 57). In the third case the disciple has a priority that stands before his desire to follow Jesus (v. 61). The first volunteer's offer is open-ended; he will go anywhere Jesus goes; (this is further explained in Matthew 8:18-19 where we see that this would be follower is a scribe) who was prepared to follow Jesus, until he heard the cost.

Maybe this person had a comfortable home life or was okay in his comfort zone?

But following Jesus is not always easy and may mean giving up what we hold comfortable, turning away from some of the things we are used to and trusting in God even if that means rejection or change.

The second scene involves a man who wishes to bury his father before he comes to follow Jesus. In Judaism, burying family members is a priority and though the request seems reasonable, it is the fact that this potential disciple's belief is that family comes before Jesus. This man was worrying about somebody else's funeral when he should have been thinking about his own death and the path he should take for eternal life.

I don't think that Jesus is asking us to dishonour our parents, but we are not to let the love of our family weaken our Love for God. We can see this in Luke 14:26, we are to love Jesus so much that our love for our family would look like hatred in comparison.

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The third man also volunteered, but he could not follow Christ because he was looking back instead of ahead.

There is nothing wrong with a loving farewell, but if it gets in the way of obedience, it becomes sin. Jesus saw that this man's heart was not wholly with Him

This excuse presents again as concern for family; but we can feel Jesus' frustration here as he interprets the request as a desire to hang on to the old life. His reply makes great sense in a Palestinian setting, since the land there is rocky and a person who looked back while ploughing would not furrow a straight row for crops.

So this too is forcefully rejected, with a warning that turning back from the task is showing oneself unworthy of discipleship, a disciple's hand is to stay at the plough.

Jesus' point here is that discipleship takes focus as there are things around us that may distract us and make us go of course.

Jesus kept his focus on His Father's will and we must also focus on the one who was sent to save us. (Hebrews 12:2)

Q 6) Jesus identifies three obstacles – material possessions, the past and family. How do these three basic obstacles specifically reveal themselves in my world?

Q 7) Can you give any examples or stories that have showed you that we can trust Jesus and continue our journey with Him?

Conclusion

Read slowly the following verses taken from Hebrews 12:1-3 of "The Message" translation of the Bible.

¹⁻³Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in.

Because Jesus never lost sight of where He was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—He was able to put with anything along the way: cross, shame, whatever. And now Jesus is at His destination - in the place of honour, right alongside God the Father in the splendour of heaven interceding for us and in the company of all who love Him as Lord.

q) How may this help us as we continue our journey of discipleship?

Thinking about what you have shared and discussed, take some time to pray for each other, specifically for the Lord's help as you/we continue in our journey of discipleship.



Sermon 2 (March 25, 2012): Weeping Over Jerusalem

Background:

Let us remind ourselves where we are up to in Luke's gospel....

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and his time of arrival will coincide with the gathering of many Jewish pilgrims who are also going to the city to celebrate the feast of the Passover. This feast recalls a time many years before, when the angel of death visited the country of Egypt, while the Israelites were slaves and killed all the first born Egyptian males. This was the final event that persuaded Pharaoh to accede to God's request, made through Moses, to set His people free. If you remember, the Israelites were spared by sacrificing a perfect lamb and painting its' blood across the door frame of their houses. From that day on they were commissioned to remember God's saving grace every year for all generations.

But Jesus was not going to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. He was going to inaugurate a new Passover, where He, Himself will be the sacrificial lamb. The one who is pure and without sin, who will save humanity from the slavery of their sin and death, leading them to the new promised land of the Kingdom of Heaven. Just as the Israelites were freed from the slavery of Egypt by Moses, so Jesus is saving all who believe in him leading them to life eternal.

Ice-breaker:

Why and how does disappointment affect us?

Study:

Q 1) Why do you think the Pharisees warned Jesus to flee from Herod? Were they sincere?

Read Luke 13:31-33

The opening verse of this passage is a bit of a surprise as we read how some Pharisees warn Jesus of the dangers facing him. Through the scriptures we read how they were always trying to catch Him out. So I wonder what their reasoning is here. We are not told, maybe they wanted to be the ones who would bring His downfall, or maybe they were genuinely concerned. The scriptures tell us that even amongst the Pharisees Jesus had his followers, for example Nicodemus (John 3:1-2, John 7:40-51, John 19:38-42).

We don't know - all we hear is the warning. Herod Antipas has always been there in the background. He beheaded John the Baptist on a whim to please his new wife's daughter after she danced for him; and his father Herod the Great ordered the killing of all the infants around Bethlehem at the time of Jesus birth. So it would appear that this is a credible threat to Jesus.

Q 2) How does Jesus respond to the news of Herod's' desire to kill him?

When Jesus receives this news from the Pharisees, he is undaunted, stands his ground and even throws an insult. He calls Herod “*that fox*”. Foxes were not held in high esteem by the Jewish people (see Nehemiah 4:3). A fox is cunning and sulks and works in the darkness. In contrast, Jesus walks in the light and brings the light to heaven to transform earthly darkness

As we read Luke, we find that every verse has something going on relating to Jesus ministry. It’s a dizzy whirl of healings, exorcisms and teachings, but time is running out for Jesus. He knows the timetable of His future. In all of this it would be easy to miss the significance of his words. On the third day I finish my work. What matters to Jesus is that he has a destiny to fulfil and we are given a clue of this in Luke 9:22, 44 and Luke 12:50.

Q 3) Compare Luke 2:41-50 and 24:13-24: What do you think of these two passages. Do you see the echoes of Jesus as a child in the temple and the risen Jesus alive on the third day?

Hindsight is a wonderful thing so what do you think now 2,000 years of the insight we have into the full meaning of these two incidents?

Q 4) Read verses 34 and 35. Who or what is Jesus lamenting?

This is "the first of four laments for Jerusalem... in Luke's Gospel (13:31-35; 19:41-44; 21:20-24; 23:27-31). The mood seems to change and out of the blue, Jesus seems to crumble with grief. We know that he is not fearful of Herod or what he might do and we know that Jesus is resolute in keeping his destiny and his faith in God is as strong as ever.

Is it really Jerusalem that Jesus is lamenting? This city with a history of violence and segregation that have killed God’s messengers in the past and is the focus of bitter struggles even today.

Jerusalem is approached by going up a hill; even today you get out of your car or the coach and go to a point to look out over the city. Then you pray the prayer that has been prayed by pilgrims ascending to that place for thousands of years: "*I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.' Jerusalem is built as a city that is at unity with itself. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May they prosper who love you.*" (Psalm 122)



Or does Jesus see Jerusalem as a symbol for all human frailty and cruelty?

The repetition of a name often signifies painful grief or great frustration (see 2 Samuel 18:33; Luke 10:41;

22:31). Here it is a cry of grief reflecting the broken heart of Jesus who could save the beloved (Us), but is prevented by their rebellion. Perhaps more than Herod’s threats, more

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than Jerusalem's flaws, Jesus is suffering under the weight of the burden he carries within himself. Herod's threats are empty, but Jesus knows that he will face death before long.

Q 5) Have you ever been through a situation where, although you were surrounded by friends and family, you felt quite alone? How did you 'know' God was in this situation?

Q 6) Read verses 34 -35 again. How does Jesus describe himself and why do you think He does so in this way?

The words that Jesus uses to describe himself are intriguing. Herod is "the fox" while Jesus describes himself as "the hen".

A hen may seem quite vulnerable in the face of such dangers. But a hen gives life. There are anecdotal stories, telling of the fierceness of a mother hen in the protection of her little chicks snuggling together under her wing when threatened and of farmyard fires, where a hen has been found burnt to death, while her chicks have been found safe and well snuggled under her wings. The people at the time would have understood the reference to the Hen as being a giver of life and supreme protector.

Both sections of this passage convey a sense of urgency and urgency is not the same as panic. Jesus words to Herod tell us that he is the master of time.

In every case were anyone is truly seeking the way to God and his Kingdom, or were somebody is trying faithfully to point the way, God knows how long is needed.

Conclusion

Consider sharing what insights you gained from your study and how these may help you in your continuing journey of discipleship with Christ.

Pray together as Lent draws us closer to the Cross.



1st April 2012

Entry into Jerusalem

Luke 19: 28-44

As we continue with Jesus on his journey towards the cross, we see that both Jesus' ministry and the whole bible so far, are heading towards a dramatic and life changing climax.

Up to now we have learned that Jesus was a wanted man even before he entered Jerusalem [John 11:57]. In fact, during the last year of Jesus' ministry he played cat and mouse with both Herod Antipas and the Chief Priests.

We read through scripture how Jesus frequently retreats to Galilee (under the rule of Herod Phillip II) where the religious climate is far less volatile.

From past weeks we see that Jesus' retreats are not through fear, but are strategic. The trips back to northern Israel give him more time to prepare his disciples for what is to come and also for their responsibilities, once He has returned to Heaven. We see that Jesus will choose the time of his death by God's guidance alone and not by man's or by Satan's.

With all this in mind, notice how the gospel story is really slowing down and how we are privy to more details of the events

Ice Breaker:

Have you ever been in a situation where time seemed to slow down or speed up? Looking back on the event, how did you feel was it helpful or stressful?

Study:

Read Luke 19: 28-44

Jesus entry into Jerusalem has been described by some as His Triumphant Entry. Although as the passage opens, it shows that the events starts slightly earlier and Jesus has not yet entered the city, but is looking out over it. A close examination shows a contradiction. On the one hand, there is the

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contagious enthusiasm of the crowds as they shout their praises to The King who is coming into the Holy City!

As he rides in we see that Jesus is amongst the celebration and yet his actions are of someone who is detached from it. Instead of lifting his hands in victory as a politician or conquering general might do, he is subdued

Then we are told that Jesus is filled with pain; as Jerusalem comes into sight He begins to weep -- not for Himself, but for the city and its inhabitants.

Jesus tears are at the heart of the Christian gospel, not through weakness, but through the knowledge of Gods impending judgement on those who have not taken any notice and continue as if God is not in control.

- 1. How does make you feel about the urgency of responding to Gods message to repent and Jesus instruction to spread the gospel to those who do not know?**
- 2. Discuss what you feel about the paradox of the event.**
- 3. Taking into account the descriptions: He is victorious, He is triumphant, yet humble and riding on a donkey; do you think a king can be both things at once?**

Maybe you could compare it against the splendour and opulence of last year's royal wedding year or the coming Queens Diamond Jubilee.

The Significance of the Donkey

In the passage Jesus instructs the disciples to go into a village where they will find a colt. This instruction is found in all four gospels and although Luke and Mark don't discuss the significance of the young donkey, in Matthew and John the instruction is made clearer and it is found to come from the prophet Zechariah (Chapter9:9-10)

*"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!
Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you,
righteous and having salvation,
gentle and riding on a donkey
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

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*I will take away the chariots from Ephraim
and the war-horses from Jerusalem,
and the battle bow will be broken.
He will proclaim peace to the nations.
His rule will extend from sea to sea
and from the River to the ends of the earth." (Zechariah 9:9-10)*

So what is the significance of the donkey?

Since time began nations have advertised their military strength and we see lots of examples in the Bible, which shows a history of nations fighting against nations.

The donkey was used as a beast of burden from the patriarchal period. It was renowned for its strength and was the animal normally ridden by non military personnel (Numbers 22:21; Judges 10:4; 1 Samuel 25:20). However, scripture indicates that riding a donkey is not at all beneath the dignity of Israel's noblemen and kings (2 Samuel 18:9; 19:26). In fact, David indicates his choice of Solomon to be king by decreeing that the young man should ride on the king's own mule (1 Kings 1:32-40).

Jesus gives clear instructions to his disciples He tells them that the donkey must be one that has never been ridden and if asked they are to say the Lord needs it.

When Jesus indicates to his disciples that he should ride on a donkey that no one had ever ridden before, he is initiating a public, kingly act. He is revealing openly that he is the Messiah.

We see in the above passage how Zechariah, five hundred years before the birth of Jesus proclaims that the Messiah would come, not with a show of strength, but to banish horses and chariots and proclaim peace for the nations. And we see how Jesus entry into Jerusalem fulfils Zechariah's prophecy. How the gentle king riding a young donkey is the same one who will defeat chariots and war-horses and bring peace to the nations.

One of the final scenes of Revelation is a picture of the conquering Christ riding a white war-horse (Revelation 19:11-16), but today he rides a donkey in hope of peace.

- 4. How do the two descriptions make you feel as a Christian, what do they say to you?**
 - a. Jesus riding on a donkey.**
 - b. Jesus riding on a white war horse at his second coming**

Praise from the Disciples (19:37-38)

Can imagine the excitement and jubilation of the people, some who are still making their way and many others are already there in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. As they hear that Jesus is about to enter the city and see the procession as it descends from the Mount of Olives they come

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out to meet him. In John 12:12,18, we see that the city is buzzing with the news of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, and the pilgrims are eager to see this miracle worker.

As this increasingly large band of "disciples" crosses the ridge and begins their descents into the Kidron Valley the people sing praise taken from Psalm 118:25 and though only one line is quoted in Luke

If we read the full passage we see how much the Psalm refers to the coming of the Messiah:

"Open for me the gates of righteousness;

I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord

through which the righteous may enter.

I will give you thanks, for you answered me;

you have become my salvation.

The stone the builders rejected

has become the capstone;

the Lord has done this,

and it is marvellous in our eyes.

This is the day the Lord has made;

let us rejoice and be glad in it.

O Lord, save us; "Hosanna!"

O Lord, grant us success.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

From the house of the Lord we bless you.

The Lord is God,

and he has made his light shine upon us.

***With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession
up to the horns of the altar.***

You are my God, and I will give you thanks;

you are my God, and I will exalt you.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;

his love endures forever." (Psalm 118:19-29).

The Stones Will Cry Out (19:39-40)

The sound is increasing. The enthusiasm is building and we see the Pharisees present in the crowd are scowling. They are deeply offended and can't suppress their contempt.

"Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples!'

'I tell you,' he replied, 'if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.' "(19:39-40)

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Jesus could be saying that if the disciples are silent the rocks themselves would be forced to offer praise. Through the Psalms it is shown that praise is sometimes poetically attributed to objects and animals (Psalm 96:11; 98:7-9; 114:1-8; Isaiah 55:12). But Jewish writings also sometimes mention mute stones bearing witness when sin has been committed -- in this case the sin of not offering praise when praise is due (Habakkuk 2:11; Genesis 4:10; and Joshua 24:27).[14]

Too blind to see to deaf to hear (19:41-44)

From verse 41 we learn what can only be described as one of the most heartbreaking statements in all of scripture. Jesus' words to Jerusalem that the city would be utterly devastated because, "*...you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.*" Or as the Contemporary English Version puts it, "*...you did not see that God had come to save you.*"

Jesus came to offer himself for the salvation of Israel. He came in fulfilment of God's promise to send a Messiah, but as John's gospel points out, "*...his own people did not accept him.*" [John 1:1)

This piece of scripture is showing us a window of opportunity that God was giving to the people, yet they did not recognise it and as a result the consequences of their rejection will continue to echo until Jesus comes again.

- 5. Have you ever missed an opportunity or two in your lifetime that you have some regret about missing? Or it may be that there was a golden opportunity that came your way and you seized it and you have been glad ever since.**

Conclusion

Light a candle and read the following:

To say that Psalm Sunday, as it is called, is the beginning of a difficult week for Jesus, is something of an understatement.

We will find that what began so triumphantly for Jesus of people spreading their garments and branches on the road to make a royal carpet for His entry, will quickly dissolve into betrayal rejection and denial.

On Sunday the words 'Hosanna in the highest!' rings out, but by Thursday the words will change as the people begin to cry out against Jesus.

The words of praise will turn bitter as the shouts of "Crucify, crucify" replace them.

As a church we will follow His journey each day through Holy Week. We will, through our meditations, reflect on the people Jesus met on His way to the cross and see how they speak to us today.

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Through Holy Week we see clearly the humanity and the divinity of Jesus as He fulfils His Fathers will to die on the cross.

Will you be a Psalm Sunday, Easter Sunday person, only coming to those two services or will you walk with Jesus each day.

Prayer

As you end your meeting pray that you will meet with the risen Christ who sacrificed Himself as the perfect Lamb of God, so that you may have eternal life with the Holy One who made you and calls you his own.
