

## Setting Our Face To Go To Jerusalem

As you know, this past Wednesday was commemorated around the Christian world as Ash Wednesday and it marked the beginning of the season the church calls Lent. Lent marks the beginning of the 40 days leading to the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ and is considered to be a time for meditating and reflecting upon the sacrifice of Christ. It is often marked by fasting either food or giving up something as we identify with Christ in his supreme sacrifice.

I have preached an advent series each year in order to focus upon the meaning of the incarnation and this year I want to use this season of Lent to focus our attention upon the cross of Christ and his sacrifice that atoned for our sins. So for these next weeks leading to Easter Sunday we will be talking about the cross and what his death provided for us.

This morning I want to just kind of set the stage and allow this message to serve as an introduction of sorts. Luke 9 in the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament reads, **“When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.”** **Luke 9:51.** The NIV reads, “Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.” The KJV reads, “He stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.” It indicates a certain, unmovable, unchangeable resolve to finish the task, to complete the mission, the reason and purpose for which he came. He set his face to go to Jerusalem and endure the suffering of the crucifixion.

You may recall that last fall before we begin the Advent sermon series I had been teaching from the gospel of Mark. Turn with me to Mark 8:27 and I want to show you something in this passage to help you see what is going on. If you can think back to those messages from Mark’s gospel you will remember that frequently the disciples and others were asking the question, “who is this? Who is this that the wind and the sea obey him? Who is this that can heal the sick and even raise the dead? Could he be the Messiah?” You may remember that this area of the Galilee was something of a hotbed for Israeli nationalism. The Zealots wanted to overthrow Rome and establish Jewish rule again and they were praying and looking for the Messiah, the Christ.

Jesus came to the villages around Caesarea Philippi to an area known now as Baniyas, where pagans worshiped the nature god pan and asked the disciples **“Who do people say I am?”** **They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others one of the prophets.’** **‘But what about you? he asked. Who do you say I am?’** Peter answered, **‘You**

**are the Christ.’ Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.” Mark 8:27-30**

Prior to this Jesus had allowed them to question and to speculate as to who he was. But once this revelation is made by Peter, (and in Matthew’s gospel Jesus tells Peter that this had been revealed to him by God the Father), Jesus begins to speak openly about his crucifixion. Prior to this statement, the emphasis of Mark’s gospel had been on who Jesus was but now that we know who he is, Mark begins to focus on what Jesus had come to do. Look at the next verse: **“He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this...” Mark 8:31-32.**

Not only did he begin to explain to them what was going to happen and why, but he also began to share with them what this would mean for his followers. **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Mark 8:34**

Six days after this Mark tells us Jesus took Peter, James and John and went up a high Mountain where he was transfigured before them and they saw his glory as he spoke with Elijah and Moses. It was after this event, when they came down from the Mountain of Transfiguration that Luke said, he set his face to go to Jerusalem for what would be the final trip. He set his face towards his death and the carrying out of his mission, the reason for which he had come.

Let me just make a few observations about this passage.

**1. What must have filled his heart and mind, knowing what awaited him in Jerusalem?** I imagine it was a sense of dread coupled with his amazing love for those he had come to save. The gospels tell us how Jesus’s heart was troubled. In the garden of Gethsemane the gospel writers tell us he was in anguish. Mark’s gospel says Jesus was “deeply distressed and troubled.” **“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.” Mark 14:34.** John gives us a glimpse into Jesus’ mind and heart in John 12 as Jesus is predicting his death. Jesus said, **“Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.” John 12:27** Overwhelmed, dreading the cup that he would have to drink, the pain he would suffer, the rejection he would feel from everyone, including being forsaken by his Heavenly Father, yet he would not turn away from it for he understood the reason for which he had come.

Think for a moment as well, Jesus had just come down from the Mount of

Transfiguration where he had once again been clothed in something of the glory he had before he came to this earth. He had to be thinking about all he had laid aside in order to become a man and all that he was about to embrace and endure as the one and only perfect sacrifice.

Timothy Keller in his book *King's Cross* speaks of these events in Mark's gospel and states, "...we cannot leave this scene without an acute awareness of what Jesus is about to lose. He has lived for endless ages in glory with the Father. On the mountain we see Jesus surrounded by God; on the cross he will be forsaken. On the mountain we see the life he has always led – embraced and clothed with the love and light of God – but on the cross he will be naked in the dark." In spite of that knowledge, we see Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem and to the cross. What an amazing image of love and mercy, courage and grace. These next few weeks, let's set our face to follow him as he goes to Jerusalem

**2. Consider his great heart of obedience.** Mark's gospel says, **"They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way..." Mark 10:32** There is no reluctance shown. He isn't dragging his feet to Jerusalem. He isn't whining and complaining. Though his heart is heavy and sorrowful, yet he marches on and with every step he is saying yes to the will of his Father, yes to the plan of redemption, yes to the cross and salvation for all who will believe and receive.

What an example to us of obedience. Jesus lived to obey his Father. In that heartbreaking scene in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus is in such anguish that the bible says his sweat became as drops of blood that fell to the ground. Look with me at Mark 14:32-36. Overwhelmed, in anguish of soul and spirit, Jesus cries out "Abba, Father" the endearing sound of a child calling for the help of his father. **"Everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."** Mark 14:36. There is no greater act of loyalty, surrender, obedience. Not what I will, but only your will to be done. Knowing it meant pain and rejection, experiencing the weight of the sins of the world and being forsaken by his Father, yet he sets his face to go to Jerusalem and there to surrender himself fully and completely to the will of God.

**3. Consider what was going through the minds of the disciples as they followed him to Jerusalem.** Mark 10 says, **"They were on their way up to Jerusalem with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid."** Mark 10:32

Astonished and afraid. That's us as we consider the story of the cross. Astonished at

such love divine. Astonished that he would come to give his life for us. Astonished and afraid as he gives them even more details of what is to come (Mark 10:33-34). He doesn't exactly allay their fear does he? Here is what is ahead. They will mock him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise but they couldn't comprehend that part. **"But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it." Mark 9:32.** Afraid. Astonished.

We set our face to go with him to Jerusalem and we are astonished. Astonished at his love, his willingness to die for us. Astonished at the extent of his suffering for me. Astonished at his obedience as he moves toward Jerusalem and I am afraid. Afraid of what? Afraid of dying with him? No, I'm afraid of understanding what this all means. I'm afraid of realizing, or of admitting why he has come, why he is headed to Jerusalem and to death on a cross. I am afraid to admit that I am the reason. I am the cause for his grief, for his sorrow and anguish.

I am the one bound by sin. I am the one who has rebelled against God and his law. I am the one perishing without hope. I am the one who deserves the pain, the suffering, the cross. I am the one who sinned and the one who should pay the penalty for my sin. I am afraid. I am afraid to say what I know, that I cannot save myself. I need a Savior. I am bound by my sin and captive to my sinful nature. I need someone to redeem me from the slavery of sin and here is the most astonishing thing of all...

**4. Consider why He set his face to go to Jerusalem.** Jesus makes plain the reason for it all, the purpose behind it all in Mark 10. **"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:45** He came to ransom me. He came to pay the price that I might go free. He died so I could live.

I don't understand it all. I can't say for sure what all such redeeming grace means. I can't explain all the meaning behind the metaphor of being ransomed. Jesus doesn't explain to whom the ransom is paid. But this I know, once I was bound by the chains of sin and sentenced to die for those sins but before the execution could be carried out, Jesus paid the full and complete ransom price to liberate and set me free. I know all I need to know: Jesus paid that ransom price with his very own flesh and blood. Jesus paid it all and He did it to set me free and to set you free. Jesus paid it all. That's why he set his face to go to Jerusalem. That's why he bled and died. He gave his life as a ransom for many.

No wonder we are astonished and afraid. We don't know how to deal with such amazing love and grace.

Several years ago I purchased a book entitled *Reliving the Passion* by Walter Wangerin Jr. The subtitle is "Meditations on the suffering death and resurrection of Jesus as recorded in Mark." I want to read a couple of pages from the preface of the book as Wangerin tells us about a special Lenten service from his childhood. (I might add, if you can find this book you would be blessed in reading it as a devotional during Lent.)

(Read I Love You Lord Jesus.)

I want you to close your eyes this morning. Picture Jesus hanging on that cross. Can you see him? Can you see him on the cross? We quote Galatians that we were crucified with Christ, meaning that we were united with him by faith, dying to sin and to self through baptism and resurrected to walk with him in new life. But like Wangerin, I wonder if we could put ourselves on that other cross beside Jesus today. I am crucified with Christ takes on a new meaning as we see ourselves hanging on one of the other crosses, dying the death we deserved. (Luke 23:41-43) But can you see yourself as you turn to him and cry out to him saying, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And can you hear him say it? Can you see his face as he turns toward you and gently says, **"...today you will be with me in paradise."** **Luke 23:43**

It was for you and for me. He came to give his life as a ransom for many. For us. What will you do? If you've not received Christ as your Savior and Lord, I encourage you to open your heart and life and call upon him today. Repent of your sins and ask Jesus to redeem you and save you. Ask him to forgive you and he will do it. The choice is yours. Call on him today.