

Daring the Journey
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Readings

Luke 19:28-44

²⁸ After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

²⁹ When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰ saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

³² So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” ³⁴ They said, “The Lord needs it.” ³⁵ Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸ saying,

“Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!”

“Liberation is Costly” by Desmond Tutu:

Liberation is costly. Even after the Lord had delivered the Israelites from Egypt, they had to travel through the desert. They had to bear the responsibilities and difficulties of freedom. There was starvation and thirst and they kept complaining. They complained that their diet was monotonous. Many of them preferred the days of bondage and the fleshpots of Egypt.

We must remember that liberation is costly. It needs unity. We must hold hands and refuse to be divided. We must be ready. Some of us will not see the day of our liberation physically. But those people will have contributed to the struggle. Let us be united, let us be filled with hope, let us be those who respect one another.

Sermon

Did Jesus know what he was getting into when he rode into Jerusalem on the back of a colt? The Gospel accounts suggest that as the “Son of God” he did. But for me the story is much more compelling and I think has more theological depth if we think of Jesus as fully human in that moment – with the sorts of uncertainties, even worries or fears, that most of us humans carry with us into life at least some of the time, and particularly into potentially treacherous situations.

So...would he have known he was riding into *some* sort of trouble? No doubt. After all he had been stirring up opposition from the authorities for some time. Would he have known that all this would lead to his arrest, crucifixion, and miraculous resurrection? That is quite another question.

In any case, I do prefer to imagine this young man – this charismatic teacher, this defender of the poor, of those living on the edge of respectable society – as actually maybe a little scared. Yet, even so, determined... led by a deep and divine sense of right and wrong – higher power if you will – to ride that colt into trouble, wherever that might lead.

To use the language of my sermon title for today, Palm Sunday, he “dared the journey.” Indeed, I expect he would have felt he had no choice, would have felt that this was what he must do, not because he was some sort of automaton, with God pulling the strings from on high, but because of this call of conscience, a deep-rooted divine call from within to serve and help and heal – individuals and society at large. So he dared the journey, come what may.

With Passover beginning, I’ve also been reflecting on Moses this week. Moses, called we are told by a mysterious voice from a burning bush, called to free his people, the Hebrew people, from their bondage in Egypt. Moses seemed perplexed at the outset, to say the least: Who or what is this voice sending me on this dangerous, maybe foolish quest? Mysteriously (and variously translated) “I am what I will become” the voice replied.

Great... big help... one can imagine the fully human Moses responding to himself.

But off Moses went, daring the journey. Confronted the Pharaoh, magically created all sorts of plagues; Pharaoh lets the people go, then changes his mind, Red Sea crossing, forty years in the wilderness, Moses with his restless, even rebellious, people. Talk about a journey! And Moses didn’t even reach the “promised land” himself. That was for another generation entirely. (And maybe “promised land” shouldn’t be taken too literally anyway.)

Be that as it may, if Moses had known where “I am what I will become” was leading him, would he have taken on the mission? We have no way to know. Yet Moses, like Jesus entering Jerusalem, dared the journey; Moses, like Jesus, taken up by an intimately felt sense of the larger reality, higher power, of which he and all of us are part.

Again, this story too is all the more powerful if we assume that Moses didn’t and could not have known how it would all turn out, where the journey would lead.

But here’s the thing: We never know how it will “all” turn out, never can know for certain where our journey will lead! Goodness, can we even know for sure how our journey through an ordinary day’s plans will turn out?

Further, sometimes it may be more accurate to say that it is the journey that dares us and not the other way around. The “dare” is this: will we accept the terms of the journey, the itinerary not that we have created for ourselves, but that life has thrown our way often without much of any input from us, without so much as a “What do you think? How would this be?”

That’s of course how it was a year ago. We had no choice as we were thrown into pandemic times, our lives changed overnight. Toss out the planned itinerary for the next year, the pandemic declared, here’s your new one... well, not all worked out yet, maybe you can figure it out as you go...

...on this journey very much not of our choosing.

Not that we had no choices whatsoever. Most of us did, after all, have a choice as to how to navigate this new unexpected and unwelcome journey, how to re-shape our lives within the confines of lock-down and Covid restrictions.

We have had and still have a choice to figure out how best to live in this changed world, to somehow find it within ourselves to embrace the journey daring us rather than only to survive it (not that I mean to underrate survival; not at all, since so many have not survived).

And I don’t know about you – for me it took more than a little getting used to, re-orienting to this dramatic turn in the journey, coming to terms with, not to mention embracing, the reality presented to us a year ago, that this is how things would be for now: wouldn’t be seeing family for a while, wouldn’t be enjoying seeing you all in person here in the Meeting House, singing together, sharing the wonderful conversations in the Parish House parlor, would have to learn something called Zoom.

Yes, took awhile to dare to embrace this new journey – which I mostly did, which most of us did, at least to varying degrees.

Now, what I’ve just been saying applies largely to those of us who were fortunate enough, privileged enough, to indeed have a fair amount of choice as to how we would modify our itinerary, embrace or at least accept the changes – reorient our work to remote, safely quarantine, and so on.

But it seems to me that it also applies to many who had and have little choice but to continue to clerk in the market, to drive the bus, to pick up the trash, to teach the kids, to care for the sick and dying. For the stories are legion of those who have dared to embrace the journey handed to them, to embrace what they had to do to scrape through economically but that also, for many of them, they felt called by conscience to do, called from their inner knowing that we are part and parcel of one another and therefore called to serve and to help and to heal as best we can.

We are and ought ever to be in grateful awe.

And now... as we slowly and cautiously emerge from pandemic restrictions, I fear that collectively we may, some of us anyway, be too anxious to return to the “before times” itinerary as we imagine those times to have been, to return to a “new normal” very much like the “old normal.” But... would this even be possible?

During their forty years in the wilderness, the Hebrew people, tired of uncertainties and privations seem to have yearned for the comfort of the old ways in Egypt even though it was in

bondage; but there was no going back. They had to continue to dare the journey, die to the old ways in order to be reborn as truly free.

And once Jesus entered Jerusalem, overturned the tables of the money changers in the Temple, his fate was sealed. There was no going back to an easy life back home in Nazareth. He too was to die in order to be reborn, so we are told.

I take this as metaphor, which is not to say as false – rather as pointing to deeper truths which perhaps apply right now to our lives as we emerge from the pandemic: no going back to pre-pandemic ways – rather, traveling forward with hope to be reborn into better ways.

After all, didn't the pandemic reveal to us inequities and injustices that ought not continue into the "after times" – and that we can help not continue?

And did perhaps some of us discover some things about ourselves and the paths of our life journeys that we could, if we dared, make part of our individual "after times" journey?

So... how about daring a new leg of our life journey freshly aware of and awake to the preciousness of our connectedness to one another – since we have become so poignantly aware of the pain of separation?

How about daring a new leg of our journey freshly aware of and awake to the preciousness of each moment – since we have become so poignantly aware of how few those moments can be?

And to paraphrase the aboriginal activist Lilla Watson, how about daring a new leg of our shared journey more deeply aware of and awake to the ways in which our liberation is indeed bound with the liberation of all our siblings on this earth we share – as Moses, as Jesus, as the Buddha, and all the sages of all times and places knew?

And so... Allowing ourselves to feel the suffering of those families at the border, who dared a long and dangerous journey for freedom and safety; allowing ourselves to feel the suffering of those unjustly imprisoned or oppressed wherever they may be, including Black Americans, Asian Americans; allowing ourselves to feel the grief of the families of so many lost to gun violence; allowing ourselves to simply truly see our neighbor in trouble...

...and in response, because we are part and parcel of one another, doing what modestly we can do... together to heal and to help, to liberate?

As I concluded last week: it all does add up.

Yes, how about daring this continuing journey together? Because the journey is always easier, indeed more joyful, together.

So it always is. So may it always be. Amen.