

Dear Partner in Preaching,

Have you ever noticed just how long it takes Jesus to get to Jerusalem? Just after the Transfiguration – two Sundays and four chapters ago – Luke records that Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem” (9:51) and then repeats that phrase shortly thereafter (v53). This phrase – more declaration than description – is clearly a turning point in Luke’s story. After going here and there and nearly everywhere in Galilee and beyond, Jesus now makes a beeline for the Jerusalem and the cross. But...

But what I’m not sure I ever quite noticed before is that Jesus doesn’t actually get to Jerusalem until near the end of chapter 19. That means Luke devotes ten full chapters to Jesus’ journey once he has “set his face to go to Jerusalem.” Which is about half of everything Luke shares about Jesus birth, life, and ministry prior to the passion story.

All of which seems a little odd to me. That is, that once Jesus has “set his face to go to Jerusalem” he would take so long to get there. Perhaps Luke, good story-tell that he is, knows that as well. And so about halfway through his “travel narrative” – though “narrative” here is a bit of a stretch; it’s more like collected journal entries than a cohesive story – halfway through his account of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem, Luke reminds us that, no matter how long it may seem to take, Jesus is absolutely determined to get there. And so the threat of Herod’s violence doesn’t deter him in the least. Nor does his knowledge that he will meet his doom in Jerusalem. Yes, it seems odd to me that Jesus’ determined and courageous march to Jerusalem takes so long. But not just odd, also important.

Why? Because I think that sometimes, I – and perhaps you as well – knowing just how important Jesus’ death and resurrection is, tend to reduce, or at least overlook, so much of what else happens during Jesus’ life and ministry. But if you slow down and pay attention to these ten chapters, it’s impossible not to notice that no matter how determined Jesus may be to get to Jerusalem, he nevertheless takes time along the way to heal those who are ill, to teach his disciples and the crowds who follows him, to engage his opponents, to bless children, to restore to the community those who have been pushed to the side, to liberate those held captive to spirits that would rob them of abundant life, to share stories about God’s unending love, to argue for persistence in prayer and the pursuit of justice, and to lament all those who refuse God’s embrace and cling instead to the protections and prizes of the world.

And all of this matters! No matter how significant the cross may be – and it is, indeed, the central revelation of God’s embrace of humankind and the triumph of God’s love – yet what Jesus says and does on the way to Jerusalem matters, too. In this passage, midway on his journey to Jerusalem, Jesus displays [a determination and courage that is inspiring](#) even as he grieves over those who refuse the way of love. Yet it is midway. He has done much already, and there is more to do. It is not yet the third day, and he will continue “casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow” (13:31-35).

All of which makes me wonder, Dear Partner, if this wouldn’t be a fit occasion on which to invite our people to see God at work in them, through them, for them right now, in the meantime,

while Jesus is still on his ten-chapter trek to Jerusalem, on the second Sunday of Lent, and while we look ahead to the cross yet are reminded that God is at work even here, even now, wherever we may be.

What Jesus does across those ten chapters between his outset for and entrance into Jerusalem matters, and what our people do day in and day out in between Jesus' resurrection on that first Easter Sunday and his eventual return in glory matters as well. The time we take to hug our children, greet our neighbor, befriend a stranger, comfort one who grieves, smile at one who is afraid, stand up for those who are being overlooked, include those who are excluded, welcome someone who is different, care for those in need... all these things matter. A lot.

Absent all the stories prior to Jesus' arrival at Jerusalem, we might imagine that Jesus' death is the story of one more tragic account of a senseless, unnecessary, even unjust death. But Jesus didn't die accidentally. He died precisely because he gave attention to those the larger world deemed insignificant and proclaimed a God who embraced and loved all, not just a few.

Similarly, Jesus' resurrection is a story of the triumph of sacrificial love over death, hate, injustice, bigotry, and all that stands against the will of God to love, bless, and save the whole world.

What Jesus does across these ten chapters – and what we do across not simply the weeks of Lent but our whole lives – matters because it both witnesses to and is empowered by the love of a God who will not give up on God's people. Ever. And it's amazing to think that in the small and large things we do out of love, the God who created the heavens and earth from nothing and raised Jesus' from death is still at work in us and through us for the sake of the world.

Thank you for your proclamation, Dear Partner. Your people will be blessed to hear you affirm that what they do matters, just as I hope you are blessed by this reminder you that what you do matters as well and so very much. Thank you. Even more, thank God *for* you.

Yours in Christ,

David