

“Passion’s Pilgrimage”

Luke 19:28-44

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=luke+19:28-44)

Dr. David W. Swink

Chilson Hills Church

Brighton, Michigan

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“When it comes to going after what you love in life, don’t take no for an answer.”

The word “journey” or “pilgrimage” is a powerful word picture to describe the Christian life. John Bunyon wrote “Pilgrim’s Progress” over 4 centuries ago. That book is still the classic description of the Christian life. When you join your life with Jesus you begin a joyous and challenging pilgrimage toward ultimate and complete fulfillment!

More recently the Church has begun to use the term journey instead of the old English word pilgrimage. Either word describes the reality of the dynamic Christian life moving towards the final goal of being present with Jesus at the throne of God.

In our modern imaginations we think that God blesses us with the opportunity of traveling with Christ along an open road like I-96. Let me admit that we do not often state this belief, but we assume it to be true. We have this fantasy that if we walk with Jesus life will be as simple as traveling on the open road.

On this Palm Sunday when we are considering the Jesus journey from crowd approval through the cross and ultimately to Christ’s resurrection, let us question this fantasy of the open road Christian journey.

The open road scenario might go something like this: Jesus began in Galilee with many followers. They instantly recognized him as a person of spiritual power. They gathered around him and did all that he asked of them. The religious leaders were thankful to God for Jesus’ coming. They offered him all the help they could. When Jesus, James, John, and Peter were up on the Mountain of Transfiguration, heaven opened and Moses and Elijah walked among them. Right then and there, the three disciples were able to raise large sums of money to build a great Cathedral to celebrate this holy site. When Jesus went into Jerusalem, the Romans realized that God was on the Jews side. The Romans quickly converted to faithful followers of the one true God and became followers of Jesus. The Romans voluntarily packed up their belongings and left Israel in order to share the good news of God’s coming to earth with the Emperor in Rome. The Chief Priest, the Levites, and the Sadducees welcomed Jesus with open arms. Jerusalem became Jesus’ City and he ruled with grace and peace forever. The Kingdom of God came upon the earth and evil was defeated.

Obviously what I just described did not happen! Wouldn’t the world be different if life with Jesus was an open road? Of course, nothing like what I just described ever happened. Life is not an open road. The journey is not an easy one. The pilgrimage with Jesus has us crawling over rocks, struggling up hill, walking in dangerous forests. At times there are enemies on every side and we are struck by fear of what might happen or what might not happen. If we want to follow Jesus, then we must replace this unconscious open road fantasy of the easy life with Jesus and accept a far more accurate, realistic picture of today’s journey with Jesus.

The Maze

Life is far more like a maze. If life were an open road, we would not need the Holy Spirit with us. We could just walk it all by ourselves. We could control our journey. We could be the captain of our own souls. But, if life is not so easy to figure out, then we need a guide to help us choose wisely along the journey. We need a guide who has walked the maze of life before us. When we face those difficult decisions and do not know which way to go, we need someone who will be our guide!

Alice, in *Alice and Wonderland*, needed guides and helpers to find her way out of the maze. As she walked within the maze she came to dead ends and cross roads. At these places on the journey, Alice needed help!

In life’s maze we need help as well! Jesus told us that this life would not be an easy open road.

“Calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? What could you ever trade your soul for?" (Mark 8:34-37, Message) (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=mark+8:34-37)

These words have special meaning to us on Palm Sunday. We know what happens after the cheering crowd goes home! We know what happens when the political leaders conspire with the religious leaders to get rid of Jesus. There is a Friday coming!

The early Church knew that the faith journey with the Risen Christ was not easy. When the Jerusalem Church was facing great persecution, Jesus' brother James wrote:

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking in anything.” (James 1:2-4) (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=james+1:2-4)

The Passionate Pilgrimage, the Spiritual Journey with Jesus is not a walk on the open highway. It is a walk through the maze of life. If you want to be victorious, then you will accept a guide who knows the maze and can lead you through it.

- You need someone who knows where the dead ends are located.
- You need someone at the crossroads who can lead you in the right path.
- You need someone who can face down the enemies who will attack you in the maze.
- You need someone who can hold up the light when the way is so dark you cannot put one step in front of the other.
- You need someone as a companion on the journey when everyone else has left you.
- You need someone who knows the way through the maze and can guide you to ultimate victory!

You need someone in the maze. And, there are consequences for people who choose to walk their own way without a guide.

There are Crossroads on the journey!

When you face a crossroads in life, you find it to be a very lonely place. Jesus walked a lonely road. He was alone when he came to the crossroads in the Garden of Gethsemane. When he needed his disciples the most, they fell asleep. The crowd turned against him. Jesus walked a very lonely road so that you and I do not ever have to walk alone.

“The Lonesome Road” TRIO

As Jesus walked that lonesome road and his disciples were not paying attention. Two men walked with Jesus during the Passion Week, but they did not listen when Jesus offered them guidance. During that week leading up to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, two men faced a crossroads in their lives. Peter and Judas had to choose which way to go. Jesus offered help. They did not listen.

Robert Frost's poem about choosing the road less traveled tells us that the choice at the crossroads makes all the difference. So it did for Peter and for Judas.

- Judas chose to follow the crowd, the common sense political ideology of his day.
- Peter chose what he thought was the road to his own security.

Both were seeking to save themselves. Jesus had warned both men at the table fellowship on Thursday evening they would be facing a cross roads in their life.

We too face choices. In High School, we must choose whether to get a job or go to college. If we choose college then at some point we must choose a major. Usually we face the choice of choosing a life partner in marriage. Then, we choose to have children, or not to have children. We must choose a career or change of career.

We face choices where all the implications cannot be known. We must choose by placing our faith in someone or something. Peter chose to save himself. Judas chose political power and intrigue. Whenever the road turns or twists and a crossroad appears, we need someone who can guide us. We need someone who knows more than we do about the implications of the choice ahead.

All of us face those points along passion's pilgrimage when we must choose a path and walk down it. Jesus chose to drink the cup in the garden. Peter chose to deny. Judas chose to betray. Your choice at life's crossroads makes all the difference! And, sometimes you must choose in the middle of a very dark place.

There are **“Dark places”** on the **journey!**

Jesus’ choice led to an empty tomb and new life for the world. Judas’ choice led to his self inflicted death on a gallows. Peter’s choice led him to a forgiveness encounter with Jesus. We all know about dark dead ends on life’s journey. Dead ends are when we come to a stop and do not know which way to turn. The way is dark. We lose energy. We lose perspective. We can sometimes lose life itself. When the way is dark, we need a guide who can lead us to safety!

There was a preacher who was traveling in the midst of a Minnesota snowstorm. He thought he could make it to the next town before the worst of the snow fell, but he was wrong. The blizzard was increasing in intensity and he was hardly able to see in front of his car. Up ahead he noticed a semi-truck barely inching along. The preacher decided the trucker could plow the way forward easier than he could, so he pulled his car in behind the trucker and followed. Several hours later the truck stopped. The preacher not knowing what else to do, jumped out of his car and pushed his way forward to the cab of the semi-truck. As he got up to the window the door opened and the trucker jump out. The preacher yelled above the wind., “How come you stopped?” To which the trucker replied, “I just figured out that we are in the middle of a lake and I don’t know how thick the ice is.”

We can follow what seems to be the most logical and common sense choice and still end up at a dead end. Only the Holy Spirit can guide us safely. Only the Holy Spirit can teach us what we need to know to save us. When we find ourselves at a dead end, then we need to check who it is we are following.

In the midst of the darkness, trust Jesus. Our guide, our redeemer, our savior has been at the dark crossroads before!

Choir: “Holy Darkness”

When you walk with Jesus in the maze of life, you find that the dark places become places of growth, the hard places become occasions of growth, the difficult times become opportunities to learn, and even the death times are occasions for God’s miracle of resurrection. On the journey with Jesus we find life, real life, abundant life!

Abundant Life is a **daily joyous march** with Jesus!

What I am saying is not new. I heard the great preacher Samuel Procter preach a sermon in the late 1970’s to a crowd of well healed preachers challenging them to teach their congregations an ethic of living without all the comforts we have grown to expect. Procter’s text was Paul’s affirmation of Christ’s presence on his journey. He said:

“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.” (II Corinthians 4:8-10)

www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ii+corinthians+4:8-10

When you are walking with Jesus, you can overcome any obstacle, climb any mountain, ford any river, and celebrate every moment. When you love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, you can walk and not ever be afraid because:

“When it comes to going after what you love in life, don’t take no for an answer.”