



SERMON 835

First Sunday in Lent

March 9, 2014

936th Week as Priest

762nd Week at St Dunstan's

27th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

THE JERUSALEM ROAD

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Imagine for this Season of Lent that we are making a pilgrimage together, a journey of forty days (which is the Bible's way of describing a long period of time), and that our destination is the holy city of Jerusalem.

We began our travels last Wednesday, a day of ashes and dust, and I reminded you—as if you had forgotten—that life is hard, and we're all going to die someday. But I didn't mean it to be bad news, because I have discovered that there is a deeper truth here. Or perhaps several truths. One is that when we stick together, and help each other, life is not as hard. Another is that if we did not die, we would not love God or one another (because we could always put it off until tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow). And finally, these things remind us that we do have a Redeemer, and that he lives.

A nineteenth century German theologian named Friedrich Schleiermacher was the first of his day to recognize our “absolute dependence” on Jesus Christ. This is a profound understanding, and one that I commend to you. All our hopes on him are founded. He is the way, the truth, and the life. And he is more, as Jesus of Nazareth always is more than we could imagine or expect.

For the Season of Lent, imagine him as our guide on the Jerusalem Road. We are, like the disciples, a small group of his followers, but we will have more people join us along the way. We take next to nothing with us on the journey—just our selves, our souls and bodies—and it will be quite a long journey.

But do not worry, because Jesus will provide for us—nourishment, rest, fresh air, lots of exercise, good conversation, and an abiding sense of peace and goodwill and fulfillment—simply because he is with us, and we *belong* to him. We belong *with* him. He knows each of us by name, and each of us is of infinite importance to him. He wants us to be on the Jerusalem Road, and he makes it clear that he wants everyone we meet to join us on the journey.

There will be times when the path is difficult and the ways are hard. Some days will be dangerous and even life-threatening. But remember: you will be safe, we will all be safe, because our guide is with us.

Yesterday’s walk with Jesus, for example, was very difficult. We found ourselves in the wilderness, and for a time he was gone and we

did not know where. Someone said that he was led by the Spirit away from our camp, and we were frightened, and we felt abandoned and alone, even though we were many, we were friends, companions in the way, and we were together. He said not to worry and that he would return. Some among us wept and cried out for Jesus to stay with us, to come back to us. We all felt vulnerable and weak, like small children without their mother. I don't think I've ever been more afraid in my life.

We learned later that he was taken by the Evil One, who bullied him, and threatened and insulted him. "If you are the Son of God, turn these stones to bread," said Satan. "Man does not live by bread alone," he replied, "but by every word that comes from God." (I think that's in the Bible somewhere.)

The Devil whisked him away and brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on the highest point of the Temple, and dared him to throw himself down, if he were really the Son of God. "You shall not tempt the Lord," said Jesus. (I think that's in the Bible, too.)

Then the Deceiver brought our Lord to the mountain that we can see in the distance. There he promised Jesus all honor and power and glory, if only Jesus would worship him. Jesus said, "Go away, Satan! The Lord God is one, and him only shall I serve!" (I'm pretty sure that's in the Bible as well.)

Jesus returned some time later, and he was very tired and very weary. He had struggled with the Evil One and he had prevailed.

After rest and food and long prayers, he gathered us together and said, “Little children, remember this day. For there will be a time and a circumstance when you will be tempted yourself. Remember that the Evil One desires you to choose him, and he will make it seem wonderful and easy to do so. He will promise you beauty, power, wealth, happiness—whatever you desire. But you must resist. Think on me at that moment,” said Jesus, “and I will save you from sin and death. I promise, I will save you. Just think on me.”

Well, thank goodness not all days are going to be that hard. This morning the sun was shining, the day was warm, the path was easy, and our steps were light. I am hopeful, and I am happy to be with you all on the Jerusalem Road. The Lord is our guide, and we will make it together to the end. **AMEN.**

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