

Walking With Jesus

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Mark 11:1-11

Sermons Series:
In Christ Together
for the World

***Jesus was a
traveling
man.***

From the region around the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus grew up, down to Jerusalem and through the area known as Samaria, Jesus was walking constantly. He was on the move, speaking to growing crowds of people. He was always accompanied by a group of men and women who were his disciples. As the opposition to his ministry grew, Jesus knew his struggle with the religious authorities was coming to a head, and he turned his face toward Jerusalem to begin his final journey. The journey comes to its end on Palm Sunday.

¹When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ²and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. ³If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" ⁴*They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, ⁵some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the*

colt?" ⁶They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. ⁷Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. ⁸Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" ¹¹Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Jesus was a traveling man. A great number of us understand that life, as travel is very much a part of our culture. In the last three months, I have traveled from Fairhope, Alabama to Anchorage, Alaska and some ten cities in between while working with presbyteries and congregations across the country. In the middle of so much travel, I find myself singing old road songs such as Simon and Garfunkel's, "Homeward Bound," Roger Miller's "King of the Road" and John Denver's "Leaving on

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a Jet Plane.” Whether you travel or not, the Christian life for all of us is a trip!

Four words that deeply express significant facets of this traveling Christian experience are journey, pilgrimage, quest and adventure. All four words involve destination and travel, goal and process, ends and means. Journey portrays travel to a destination. On Palm Sunday, our Lord journeyed from Jericho to Jerusalem. Our lives journey toward all manner of destinations; in fact, life is very much a succession of journeys and destinations. A few weeks ago, a man living in Arlington called me. I knew his name as a Yorktown High School classmate of mine. He said, “We want you to know we are having our 45th reunion on May 14. Will you come?” I was supposed to be in Jacksonville, Florida that day, but I have changed my schedule. I have just got to go and gawk at all those old people! They have set up a website for the reunion where classmates tell the stories of their last forty-five years. There is a list of the fifty-three out of our class of five hundred who have died. You can’t help but read that list without a profound sense of the journey of life and that the journey of life our Lord offers is unique for each of us.

Pilgrimage is associated with the passage to a holy place or to the Holy One. A group I traveled with to the Holy Land had a real sense of pilgrimage

as we approached places such as the Sea of Galilee and the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. I will never forget the surreal experience of looking at the Sea of Galilee and thinking Jesus stood here and saw this very water. If you spend a day on retreat for a time of reflection, meditation and prayer with our Lord, such a day is a pilgrimage to encounter the Lord who loves us.

A quest is a journey, often long and challenging, in pursuit of a noble goal. A quest is the ardent pursuit of a momentous end. The word “quest” always reminds me of the Knights of the Round Table as they pursue some mission of mercy or of Don Quixote, the Man of La Mancha, as he sings, “This is my quest, to follow that star, no matter how hopeless, no matter how far. To fight for the right without question or pause to be willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause.”¹ Quest is a wonderful word to describe the Christian experience, because we very much have an end in mind—in this life, the *missio dei*—the mission of God—and in the life to come, as Jesus said, “*Where I am, there you may be also*” (John 1:4 NRSV).

Adventure is what you experience on your journey, during your pilgrimage, as you

¹ “The Impossible Dream,” Mitch Leigh and Joe Darion. 1965.

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pursue your quest. Adventure may feel exciting and daring or perhaps risky and scary. There is a sense of zeal about adventure, and I love the spirit of adventure on the road of the Christian life as you and I take the adventure our Lord has for us.

Jesus was a traveling man who deeply understood journey, pilgrimage, quest and adventure, and in every journey, pilgrimage, quest and adventure Jesus had people walking with him. As you and I put our trust in Jesus, embrace and follow Jesus, then in every journey, pilgrimage, quest and adventure in your life, you are walking with Jesus. We have the ultimate traveling companion, the Lord's own self. We are walking with Jesus and the companions of Jesus. As we sing to the Lord with the worship song, *Step by Step*, "And step by step You lead me and I will follow you all of my days."² Even if you have questions about God, if you are trying to come to grips with who Jesus is, I can assure you that in every journey, pilgrimage, quest and adventure of your life, Jesus is walking with you, loving you more than you love your next breath, leading you to know and experience the God who loves you.

Sometimes people make comments such as "It's the

journey or the pilgrimage that is important and not the arrival at the destination." Ann Marie and I recently flew to Honolulu to visit our daughter and her husband, who is stationed there with the Air Force. Believe me, the destination was more interesting than the journey. However, there is no destination without the journey and there are many wonderful moments our Lord gives us to enjoy on the way. Even a causal grasp of Scripture's teaching concerning ultimate and eternal ends tells you while the pilgrimage and journey to get there in this life are significant, they are not more significant than their destination, that of being face-to-face with the Lord who loves us.

Wonderfully, as we walk with Jesus, we have traveling companions. Last week, I spoke with a friend of mine whose husband was hospitalized after a horrible year of illness and physical decline. She was feeling a bit overwhelmed because, earlier in the day, sixteen men from her church had descended on the house to repair gutters, replace a banged up front door, fix the fence around the house and countless other things. She said to me, "Whatever the phrase, 'friends of the heart' means, that's it!" When you are walking with Jesus, you are walking with the people of Jesus who are walking with you, loving you.

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*Sometimes
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air.*

On that first Palm Sunday, the travel day for Jesus began in Jericho with his twelve disciples and perhaps a few others. They walked from Jericho to Jerusalem, a journey of some 15 miles over the hilliest, most barren rocky ground, you can imagine. Yet, even over that barren ground the friends of Jesus have the joy and security that comes of walking with Jesus. No matter where the walk of your life takes you, Jesus walks with you.

The fact is, our God understands the pressures we face in the walk of daily life and wants us to know that we can rely on the Lord who loves us in the midst of whatever journey, pilgrimage, quest or adventure we may be on. Chuck Swindoll once wrote this note, "As I write this I'm at 35,000 feet. It's 5:45 pm, Saturday. It should be 4:15. The plane was an hour-and-half late. People are grumpy. The lady on my left has a cold and makes an enormous sound when she sneezes (about every ninety seconds—I've timed her!). It's something like a bull moose with one leg in a trap. The sports film on golf just broke down. It's a zoo! For a change, I refused to be hassled by today's delay. I asked God to keep me calm and cheerful, relaxed and refreshed. Know what? He did. He [God really] did! No pills. No booze. No hocus-pocus. Just relaxing in the power of Jesus. I can't promise

you that others will understand. You see, I've got another problem now. Ever since take-off I've been smiling at the flight attendants, hoping to encourage them. Just now I overheard one of them say to the other, 'Watch that guy wearing glasses. I think he's had too much to drink.'"³ Why was Chuck Swindoll able to handle the craziness of that airplane flight? Because he knew he was walking with Jesus. He re-centered himself on the Lord who loves him.

Sometimes our journey, quest, adventure can feel like a plane flying through turbulent air. I remember a rough work week. I had several talks that needed to be written, several deadlines for administrative work were due, there were two deaths in the church that week and several other people problems. I was sitting at my desk, literally running my hand through my hair (I had enough hair to run my hand through it then), and I was getting more uptight by the minute when Thelma Bishop, my assistant, walked into my office. Thelma had experienced huge heartache in her life, things had happened to her family that were stressful and, at times, tragic. Thelma was a lover of Jesus Christ. Her spirit was like a mountain. Massive, centered, still. She

³ Charles R. Swindoll [Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life](http://www.vanishingcookies.com/kensapp/illustrations/Illus_35000_feet.html)
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said to me, "Be still, Stan. Fret not. Find your Center. You are walking with Jesus and Jesus is walking with you. God really is in control." She was right. I just needed someone to remind me that in walking with Jesus, Jesus is walking with me and that is what I am reminding you of today in the midst of whatever is going on in your life. No matter where the walk of your life takes you, Jesus walks with you.

When they left Jericho, Jesus and his disciples walked to Jerusalem along the Wadi Qelt, a valley going west from Jericho all the way to Jerusalem. It's a very deep ravine that looks like a miniature grand canyon. As they walked along the path, at the bottom of the ravine several hundred feet below, they saw an aqueduct carrying water along the path, accented by the stark beauty of the barren hills and the gentle noise of flowing water. When I was in Israel, my group walked that ravine from Jerusalem to Jericho. After an hour or so, the twenty of us had strung out over half a mile, some of us walking in two's to talk, many of us walking alone, admiring the beauty and praying to the Lord. Jesus would have walked with one or two people at a time. You can know that Jesus walks with you personally, side-by-side.

The journey, quest and adventure of Palm Sunday continued to unfold, Jesus and those walking with him on the

backside of the hill of the Mount of Olives. On the other side was another grand hill upon which the city of Jerusalem stood. So, they came up the back side of the Mount of Olives, stopping in the little outlying village of Bethany to pick up the colt upon which Jesus rode. Then down the other side of the Mount of Olives they went into what is called the Kidron Valley and up the other side of the valley, up the grand hill on which the city of Jerusalem stood and the dramatic breath-taking scene of the grand city of Jerusalem would have leapt into view.

When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches on the road. As he rode along, the people in front of him and behind him shouted, "Hosanna!" Sometimes we think "Hosanna" was the kind of thing we'd shout at a parade like "Wahoooo," but Hosanna was actually a prayer meaning, 'save, we pray.' It was a prayer. "The Messiah is here. Lord, save us, we pray. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

You and I have the opportunity to merely watch Jesus go by like a celebrity in a parade, or we can join in the procession and walk with Jesus. Once there was a large church in a great industrial city, and the most active and generous per-

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son of the church was a woman who was married to one of the most prominent and wealthy businessmen in the community. He never came to church. He did nothing for it. He gave nothing to it. As the years went on, that man was on the conscience of one of the young men of that church. He said to himself, I've got to do something about that man. So, after long deliberation and prayer, he finally worked up his courage and made an appointment with the man. The man was older, austere, sitting behind a great desk in his office. The young man sat in front of him and began his story. In very simple terms, he set before him the Christian proposition [the Lord who loves him, our problem of the sin emptiness and the call to believe in Jesus and follow him] and said, "I think you ought to do something about this one way or the other."

When the young man finished, there was dead silence. The man behind his desk never spoke, never moved. The young man gathered himself together and went over his story again, amplifying it a little [more on God's love and promise of life, how our sin separates us from the God who loves us, the forgiving work of Jesus' death on the cross, the call to hand our lives over to Jesus]. When he finished, still there was silence. At that point, he wished he had never undertaken that particular mission, but he drew himself up once

again and briefly restated the story of God's love in Jesus Christ. When he finished, there was not a sound. Finally, while he wished for a way out of the room, the man reached for a pad and wrote something on it. He passed it to the young man, and this is what he had written, "I am so deeply moved that I cannot speak." That businessman learned to walk with Jesus and to celebrate the love that would lead Jesus to walk with him. He became one of the great Christian leaders in that city.⁴ Hosanna, save us, we pray. A weary soul discovered Jesus and rejoiced.

This Palm Sunday day, you and I have the opportunity to merely sit and watch Jesus go by like a celebrity in a parade, or we can join in the procession and walk with Jesus, knowing he walks with you. Open your life to the Lord who loves you and wherever the journey, pilgrimage, quest or adventure of you life may take you, know you are walking with Jesus, the Lord of Life, who walks with you.

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Scripture is from the NRSV.

⁴ Dr. Robert Kopp, excerpt from "It's All About Jesus" by John Huffman, pastor of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, Newport Beach, CA (March 28, 1999, p.5-6) appearing in JFM 2000 Dynamic Illustrations.