

"Who Are the People You Travel With ... to Jerusalem?"

2 /26/12

I. IF YOU COULD CHOOSE YOUR OWN TRAVELING COMPANIONS ON A PILGRIMAGE TO JERUSALEM, WHOM WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

A. ***If it is your last trip to the big city and you know you are going to be killed, would that make a difference as to the people you would select?***

1. In the Gospel of Luke and Matthew, Jesus goes up to Jerusalem several times, but in Mark there is only one trip, his journey to the Cross.
2. In Mark all of his life, his public ministry, it all leads up to this. It is what is going to make or break Jesus, the one big confrontation with the establishment religion and the Roman authorities.
 - a. At one point Jesus and his traveling companions get to a point where they pause for a rest. They look up ahead of them several miles and see the great city in the distance.
 - b. Jesus looks and he breaks down in tears,
 - (1) *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones the those who are sent to (you). How often I have desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"* (Luke 13:31-35).
 - (2) I remember a story of a horrible fire that wiped out a farm, burned the house, the barn. The family did escape and much of their livestock. The farmer and his wife found what was left of their hen coop. The burned carcass of the mother hen was still hot, but underneath her were found her baby chicks safe and still alive.
[PAUSE]
 - c. In that same passage Jesus announces, *"I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem. 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord'"* (Luke 13.13). [PAUSE]

B. ***Even Jesus was not able to restrict his fellow travelers to his own small band of faithful. There were other would-be disciples who came along.***

1. There was the mob, the crowd, whom the Gospels labeled loosely as "the Jews."
2. We read of others he seemed to pick up along the way: possibly Zaccheus, and the once-blind beggar Bartimaeus, as he passed through Jericho.
3. And those who had been at Bethany and were the shocked witnesses who watched him raise Lazarus.
4. At least one of the recovered lepers out the ten that were cured.
5. The man who owned the colt of and wanted to be sure he recovered his animal.
6. When he took a trip away from his base of operations, the truth is that those who traveled with Jesus were often thrust upon him, not by choice.
 - a. He had to deal with them, minister to them.
 - b. And both their lives and the life of Jesus were affected, changed.
7. *We will learn, I think, that his triumphal entry was anything but triumphant.*
 - a. It was triumphal only in the eyes of a few people who celebrated, who did not really know what was coming down.
 - b. For Jesus and those closest to him, it was, I believe, a time of loneliness and feeling all alone, very private,
 - c. They came because it was their destiny.

II. THE FIRST GROUP OF TRAVELING COMPANIONS IS AT THE SAME TIME THE MOST SHOCKING GROUP, THE MOST OUTRAGEOUS AND UNACCEPTABLE GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS!

A. ***Our assigned text from the pastoral letters on this first Sunday in Lent is from 1 Peter 3:13-22.***

1. A controversial passage where Peter tells us that Jesus went to Jerusalem and suffered God's will for our sins, "once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring (us all) to God."
2. "In the spirit Jesus in his suffering went and preached to the spirits in prison," to those notorious masters of evil from the days of Noah.
 - a. We read about them back in Genesis 6, where the evil angels went down to earth before the flood and had sex with the human women, took them for their wives.
 - b. In Biblical days, legends taught that those were the most evil beings ever, and they were being kept as evil spirits in prison in Hades.
3. For those Harry Potter enthusiasts, it would be like the two who got loose from the high security fortress on the island in the middle of the North Sea, the Prison of Azkaban. They did so with the help of their prison guards, the Dementors. Evil curses were unleashed on the people, many became insane.
 - a. Do you believe the saying that "some folks are just born evil, and there is no changing them"?
 - b. Imagine Jesus going and preaching release to those captives in order to bring them to God!
 - c. Maybe in our country some of the Al Quaida terrorists of Bin Ladin escaping our prison camp in Cuba, and making their way here to Montana!
4. These, then, became the companions of Jesus at the time of his Passion!
 - a. Absolutely shocking, frightening!
 - b. What is the message here in 1 Peter 3?
 - c. And why this lesson first, on the first Sunday in Lent?

B. ***For what reason did God send his Son Jesus into the stronghold of Satan?***

1. It validates "the limitless extent of the gospel of suffering," wrote European theologian Bo Reiche 40 years ago.
2. Wherever God's creation suffers, there God is willing to send his Son, that Christ might bring them back to God.
 - a. Hell is a place without any hope, where there is no God.
 - b. It is more of a spiritual condition than a place.
3. In ancient days there were many vivid and imaginative stories...despite their remoteness in time...these evil biblical figures still captured the imagination of people: the time of greatest sin and rebellion.
4. The writer in Genesis 6 tells us, "The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth...it was evil continually. The LORD was sorry that he had made humankind, and it grieved him to his heart."
5. What did Christ "proclaim"?
 - a. Eternal judgment or the gospel of hope..?.
 - (1) the release of captives and recovery of sight to the blind,
 - (2) and those who sit in the deepest darkness.
 - b. I think he came there to announce the defeat of Satan once and for all, so that we might see Satan fall like lightning from heaven!
6. This is the only reference of Christ descending into the underworld, and yet it must have been so important, so vital to human hope, that it made it into our Apostles' Creed. (page 2)

- a. I had an elder in Reedsport, Oregon, who refused to accept this one phrase in the Creed. I cannot believe that Jesus ever descended into Hell; it would have contaminated him. Jesus would have nothing to do with Hell.
- b. That church member missed the whole point.
- 7. There is no one and no place that is beyond God's love and providence.
 - a. Remember how the church suffered, members tortured, lies told about the Christians, in Rome during Peter's day!
- 8. Those of us who try to isolate ourselves from all the bad folks, as if to think that is the way the church must keep pure– those church people know nothing of the Gospel of Jesus' ministry.
 - a. Inside the church is the best place to find sinners, the best place to share suffering, the best place to seek forgiveness.

C. ***It has been said that the destruction of our present world has been delayed solely on account of God's presence and God's patience.***

- 1. The old Ark is the prototype of the church "on the sea of time" and some in the Ark feel it is anticipating a disaster at sea.
 - a. Maybe you and I feel like we are in a life boat.
- 2. There were eight passengers on the first Ark, each one destined for baptism through the flood and for salvation.
 - a. The other sinners or spirits, especially the angels and sons of men, it is said were given 120 years to repent... and God is still patiently waiting.
- 3. In this respect, Peter warns us, be sure you suffer for the right reasons, for your faith, for Jesus.
 - a. None of us are righteous, but through enduring suffering for Christ, we receive God's own righteousness and his salvation.

III. IT IS SAID THAT NO ONE HAS EVER GOTTEN OUT OF HELL. NONE OF THE SPIRITS IN PRISON OUT OF DARKEST DESPAIR. WELL, NONE OF US WILL EVER GET OUT OF THIS WORLD ALIVE EITHER.

A. **"Abandon all hope, all who enter here," reads the sign above the gate of Hell, says Dante Alieghieri's epic poem, "Inferno," 800 years ago...**

- 1. *"Through me you pass into the city of woe:
Through me you pass into eternal pain:
Through me among the people lost for aye.
... Eternal, and eternal I endure.
Abandon all hope, ye who enter here."*
- 2. I served as a police chaplain during my interim 8 months in Lake Charles, Louisiana. I volunteered to lead worship in Calcasieu Parish Sheriff's Prison a number of times. The first time for me was a startling experience. I was taken by the prison guard into the heart of the Parish Prison and a door to a large room without windows was unlocked. I was put in the room, the door was locked, the deputy said he would return in an hour. There I was with a group of convicts–just them and me. They had their own band and PA system and their Bibles. I had these visions of never getting out of that room alive and back to the safety of my pick up in the parking lot! But after one hour together, I want to tell you that was a transforming experience through the power of God's Holy Spirit. The worship of the spirits in prison was very real (page 3)

and very honest. Those convicts could also tell if I was a phony or genuine. I have to say I preferred their worship to that of our own church.

a. I did get out of that place. I also went back, several times.

B. ***Riner Maria Rilke, about 100 years ago, gave us, "Christ's Descent into Hell" I now would like to read it to you in closing...***

"When it was too much, he went out
of the body's unspeakable suffering. Rose. Stepped away.
Thus abandoned, the darkness grew afraid
and hurled its bats
at the pale thing—the twilight still reeling
with their dread of colliding
against its frozen torment. Dark, restless
air grew discouraged over the corpse; and the strong
and watchful animals of night felt all at once hollow,
reluctant to move.

" Maybe his just released ghost chose to hesitate there,
near him, in the world. Because the event of his
anguish was still enough.

Nocturnal life struck him as gentle,
and like some room that's set aside for mourning
he reached out to encompass it. .??.

But the earth, parched from the thirst of his wounds,
ripped open below him unleashing its shrieks.

He, authority on horror, heard all hell
scream out and demand to know
if it was over yet: apparently they thought they saw
in the fulfillment of his (endless) pain
the end of their own. And he plunged in,
his spirit did, with the full weight
of the body's exhaustion: moving urgently
through the startled eyes of the driven transparent,
he hurriedly lifted his eyes to meet Adam's,
hurried down, faded, appeared, and vanished in his fall
to more appalling depths. Suddenly (higher, higher)
suspended right over the middle of the boiling screams,
he stepped forth from the tall
tower of his perseverance: without breathing,
stood there, without a railing, landlord of agony. Silent." [PAUSE]

C. ***If Christ can come to save such as those whom we label "unsavable," he can come to me who is the chief among sinners, making me an example, confessed Paul in 1 Timothy 1:15-16, an apostle who suffered more than any one else for Christ's sake.***

1. Paul says, "I received mercy and utmost patience."

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And let all of God's people respond by saying... "Amen!"