

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ who still gathers us in His holy presence like a mother hen today and always, amen.

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 tells us Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem.” For added emphasis Luke repeats the same phrase again, just a couple of verses later... “Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem,” this phrase is a declaration of Jesus intent. It’s also 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. Except that for Jesus, a beeline takes quite a while, ten full chapters in Luke’s Gospel...

I’m not sure I ever quite noticed before how long it takes Jesus to get where he’s going and it’s not just because he has to walk everywhere... Luke tells us Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem in chapter 9, but he doesn’t actually arrive there until the end of chapter 19. He devotes ten full chapters to Jesus’ journey after telling us not once, but twice that Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem.” Those ten chapters, they amount to about half of everything Luke shares with us about Jesus birth, life, and ministry prior to the passion story.

Now that I’ve noticed this, it seems a little odd to me. That is, once Jesus has determined he would go to Jerusalem, why does he take so long to get there.

Maybe Luke, the good story-tell he is, wants to weave all the stories about Jesus into his one big story. The problem I have with that explanation is calling these ten chapters of Luke's Gospel a story is a bit of a stretch. These ten chapters are more like a travel narrative or a travel journal than a cohesive story. So, about halfway through his account of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, Luke reminds us, no matter how long it may seem to take, Jesus is absolutely determined to get there. You or I would certainly get distracted by all the mission work that needs to be done and probably forget about Jerusalem all together. Jesus doesn't forget, not is all the mission work a distraction. Jesus doesn't hesitate to make pit stop after pit stop to teach, heal, performing one miracle after another, even raising a few folks from the dead. Even through all of the clatter and clamor of a world run amuck Jesus' face is still set on Jerusalem and all he knows will take place once he finally does arrive. In today's travel journal entry, Jesus is undeterred by reports of the threat of Herod's violence now aiming his way. Jesus is on his own timeline and nothing is going to distract him.

It seems peculiar to me, considering how determined and courageous Jesus is to march to Jerusalem, that it takes so long. The conclusion I've come to is it's odd, but also equally important. Sometimes I, and maybe you too, tend to forget how important the things Jesus does along the way, while on his march to Jerusalem, really are. I mean we place so much importance on Jesus' death and

resurrection we tend to overlook, so much of what else happens during his life and ministry. 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 still takes time along the way to heal those who are ill, to teach his disciples and the crowds who follow 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 evil spirits, to share stories about God's unending love, to argue for persistence in prayer, and in the Gospel for today, to lament all those who refuse God's embrace and would rather cling instead to the stuff of this world.

Here's the thing I take away from all the things Jesus does on his way to completing God's mission, it all matters! Yes, the cross is 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 awe inspiring. While he grieves over those who refuse the way of God's love, he's still determined to continue casting out demons and performing cures. He's only at the midway point. He's done much already, but there's still more to do. It's not yet the third day. In John's Gospel Jesus would say his hour has not yet come.

All of this leads me to the conclusion that the work we do is also important. I don't mean important in a way that secures your place in heaven, but rather

important because, just like Jesus did, we are also invited to help usher in a little bit of God's Kingdom here on earth. God is at work in and through you in real time. While Jesus is still on his ten-chapter trek to Jerusalem, on this second Sunday of Lent and while we look ahead to the cross and resurrection, God is at work here and now, wherever we may be. What Jesus does across those ten chapters between setting his face toward and his entrance into Jerusalem, matters. Likewise, what we all do day in and day out between Jesus' resurrection on that first Easter Sunday and his eventual return in glory matters too. 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 making these beautiful quilts and raising the money to ship them, making the school kits, the personal care kits, and now the baby kits, all the kindness you show to your family and friends ... all these things matter... A lot.

If we didn't have all the stories about what Jesus did before his arrival at Jerusalem, we might think Jesus' death nothing more than a story of one more tragic account of a senseless, unnecessary, even unjust death. In case you didn't know this before, I'm telling you now, Jesus didn't die accidentally, unnecessarily, or senselessly. He died precisely because he gave attention to those whom the larger world deemed insignificant. Jesus death happened because he proclaimed a

God who embraced and loved all people, not just a few. 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.

Considering all the mayhem in our world, like the most recent mass shooting at the Mosques in New Zealand, this world needs much more of that sacrificial love...

What Jesus does across these ten chapters and what we do across not simply the weeks of Lent, but our whole lives matters because we are witnesses to God's love. We're empowered by the love God to continue doing the things Jesus did because God will not give up on the human race... Ever... It's amazing to think that the God, who created the heavens and earth from nothing and raised Jesus' from the dead, is still at work in us and through us for the sake of the world.

Be blessed to hear and to know what you do matters, not to secure your place in heaven, but to bring a slice of heaven here to earth. Today I say thank you for all you do; from the welcome and hospitality shown to families grieving the loss of a loved one to making these marvelous quilts for suffering people hundreds or thousands of miles away, whom you do not know. May you know how much everything you do matters, the large grand gestures and the small silent gifts like doing the dishes after a funeral meal. May the Kingdom of God come to you as you serve in Jesus name and may you experience God's peace and joy in serving however you are able. Amen.