

Knox-Calvin Presbyterian Church, Harriston, Ontario

Meditation for Sunday March 14, 2021

Fourth Sunday in Lent

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Fourth Sunday in Lent - PWS&D resource

- L: The journey to Jerusalem is long.
This is a wilderness journey and we are not always comfortable. But we trust and we persevere.
- P: We are pilgrims on a journey.
We are travelers on the road.**
- L: God's people are familiar with wilderness.
After Egypt, they wandered in hunger and thirst—confused and tired—waiting for the promised land. Our destination is different.
We aim for Jerusalem—where it all ends—and where there will be new beginnings.
- P: We are pilgrims on a journey. We are travelers on the road.**
- L: Let us pray.
- All: God of the wilderness,
give us strength when we wander.
When we stray and grieve, hunger and thirst, you have promised to make water spring up in the desert. Quench our thirst. Feed us with manna.
Strengthen us when we are tired or lack trust. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.**

Matthew 4:12-17

"A Move to Capernaum"

We make a big mistake should we ever think the life of Jesus, or any aspect of it, as pedestrian. It was anything but.

"Pedestrian" is an interesting term. Merriam-Webster gives it a twofold meaning. One, relating to anything having to do with walking; the other, used primarily as an adjective, refers to that which is commonplace or unimaginative. Synonyms are boring, colourless, dreary, drudging, drab, monotonous, tame. You get the idea.

Though none of us would ever dare to apply any of those terms to our Lord, I do think when we read portions of the gospel accounts of his life—especially some of the details reported about his life—that we tend to do that. We tend to treat them as, well, pedestrian. Case in point: Matthew's account (Luke and Mark both write of it, too) of Jesus deciding to move to Capernaum. "Leaving Nazareth, he [Jesus] went and lived in Capernaum which was by the lake..."

We easily gloss over that, reading it as if it were a mere diary entry. The gospel writers, though, were more than mere reporters of the facts surrounding the rather remarkable life of one remembered still, more than 20 centuries after. They relate the meaning and significance of those facts. They convey the symbolism and drama behind those facts.

In this case, Jesus' move from Nazareth to Capernaum was much more than a matter of relocating, of deciding to set up shop in another venue. There were definite reasons for Jesus deciding to do what he did. Other events played a part in his decision.

We know, for instance, primarily from Luke, that when Jesus began his teaching ministry in Nazareth, the town where he grew up, that the townsfolk rejected him. They drove him out of their town. Threatened to push him off a cliff even. The hostile atmosphere there was such that Jesus could perform no miracles in Nazareth. So he had to move on.

Two other factors influenced Jesus in his decision. One was the fact that his cousin, John, the Baptizer had been arrested and thrown into prison. The other was the abiding influence of Jesus' time in the wilderness shortly before where he encountered Satan and was presented with other more outwardly appealing and attractive avenues for pursuing his ministry.

But what settled it, according to Luke, was Jesus' understanding of the Old Testament prophets. Prophets like Isaiah who's quoted in this passage. And there's also the prophet Nahum whose name was memorialized in the naming of Capernaum. Capernaum, you see, literally means "village of Nahum."

And what's the message of the book of Nahum? The destruction of Nineveh, the ancient capital of Assyria which had been destroyed well before Jesus' day. A careful look at the book of Nahum, however, suggests that Nineveh and Assyria represent the forces of evil (i.e., the devil and his angels) that are at war with the Lord (see Nahum 1:9-13). When Matthew thus speaks of the people of Zebulun and Naphtali sitting in darkness, he's saying that spiritually speaking the people are still in Assyrian captivity which is the captivity of sin. But Jesus' move to Capernaum is a first indication that this captivity is about to end, for Jesus will defeat the Assyrian forces of evil and bring freedom to his people (see Nahum 1:13). The events of Holy Week soon to be here remind us of this.

When Jesus decided to move to Capernaum, he was declaring his intent. He was defining the nature of his ministry. And he expands on that immediately afterwards in his Sermon on the Mount, in the Beatitudes (recorded for us by Matthew in chapter 5). Teachings so radical and so antithetical to the ways of the world that, if followed, lead to self-denial and to some form of death, either figurative or literal (as it did for Jesus and the disciples who followed after him.)

All this resulting from the not so simple move to Capernaum and the conscious choice, the deliberate decision that led to it!

If anything, this should give us pause to reflect on how our own lives have been affected by the moves we've made over the years or that others decided to make for us. In my own life, I think of how my parents decided to immigrate to the United States when I wasn't even four years of age. And I think of the decision we made to move to Canada in 1988 to pastor a church in Drayton. The original intent was to remain in Ontario for only five years; this past week marked the start of my 34th year here!

Yes, decisions have consequences and the consequences can be far reaching. Decisions ultimately define and shape a life. That's why we have to make them prayerfully, with the wisdom available to us at the time, all the while trusting in God's never failing, ever caring providence.

And if ever you're considering a move to Capernaum or, more likely, asked to provide wisdom to a son or daughter or grandchild who's considering such a potentially life-changing, life-defining move, may these words by William Barclay offer some guidance:

"There was a kind of symbolic finality in [Jesus] move. In that moment Jesus left his home never again to return to live in it. It is as if he shut the door that lay behind him before he opened the door that stood in front of him. It is the clean cut between the old and the new. One chapter was ended and another had begun. Into life there come these moments of decision. It is always better to meet them with an even surgical cut than to vacillate undecided between two courses of action."

We can rejoice in the move Jesus once made, knowing the implications it had for him and, ultimately, for us!

Prayer

Generous Father, you have told me to ask you for whatever I need. You said that if I ask, it will be given. If I seek, I will find. If I knock, the door will be opened to me. I ask you for guidance and direction now, Lord, and pray that you would answer my request. You are a perfectly good Father who only ever gives good gifts to his children. You love to give good gifts to those who ask. As your humble child, I ask for the gift of wisdom today.

O Lord, my God, help me to trust you with my decisions and my future. Let me lean on you with all my heart instead of relying on my own imperfect understanding. Give me clear guidance in my life, Lord. As I submit myself to you, I know that you will direct my paths and I can have confidence that your direction is always the best way to go.

We pray for those dear to us and all those we've come to lean on in the months of the pandemic...

We pray for those who are struggling in isolation or frustration...
for all those who experience illness or pain in body, mind or spirit...
for all who have lost someone or something central to their lives
and have to cope with grief and loss...

May all these, your children, know your grace and mercy.

We pray for peace and safety in the world...
for countries struggling to care for their citizens and to rebuild their economies...
for all who do not receive the respect and consideration they deserve...
for all those persecuted for their faith or their views...
for all who are disenfranchised and long to live in freedom...

May all these, your children, know your grace and mercy.

We pray for your church around the world and for the congregations we know...
for the work of presbyteries across Canada and the faithful ministries they lead in this time of working at a distance...
for the learning we have gained in outreach during the pandemic and all who have connected to your church in new ways...
and for ministers and other leaders who are finding this time of planning and decision making very stressful...

May your church in all its many expressions know your grace and mercy.

We pray for the concerns on our hearts this day,
for the fears and frustrations we struggle with...
for any troubled relationships...
for the doubts and the hopes which compete within us...
for any need of healing and support...

May we, your children, know your grace and mercy.

We offer these prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Hymn: *O sing a song of Bethlehem*

O sing a song of Bethlehem,
Of shepherds watching there,
And of the news that came to them
From angels in the air:
The light that shone on Bethlehem
Fills all the world today;
Of Jesus' birth and peace on earth
The angels sing away.

O sing a song of Nazareth,
Of sunny days of joy,
O sing of fragrant flowers' breath,
And of the sinless boy:
For now the flow'rs of Nazareth
In ev'ry heart may grow;
Now spreads the fame of his dear name
On all the winds that blow.

Hymn: *You have come down to the lakeshore*

You have come down to the lakeshore
Seeking neither the wise nor the wealthy,
But only asking for me to follow.

Sweet Lord, you have looked into my eyes,
Kindly smiling, you've called out my name.
On the sand I've abandoned my small boat;
Now with you, I will seek other seas.

You know full well what I have, Lord;
Neither treasure nor weapons for conquest,
Just these my fishnets and will for working.

Sweet Lord, you have looked into my eyes,
Kindly smiling, you've called out my name.
On the sand I've abandoned my small boat;
Now with you, I will seek other seas.

O sing a song of Galilee,
Of lake and woods and hill,
Of him who walked upon the sea
And bade the waves be still:
For though, like waves on Galilee,
Dark seas of trouble roll,
When faith has heard the Master's word,
Falls peace upon the soul.

O sing a song of Calvary,
Its glory and dismay;
Of him who hung upon the tree,
And took our sins away:
For he who died on Calvary
Is risen from the grave,
And Christ, our Lord, by heav'n adored,
Is mighty now to save.

You need my hands, my exhaustion,
Working love for the rest of the weary,
A love that's willing to go on loving.

Sweet Lord, you have looked into my eyes,
Kindly smiling, you've called out my name.
On the sand I've abandoned my small boat;
Now with you, I will seek other seas.

You who have fished other waters;
You, the longing of souls that are yearning;
O loving Friend, you have come to call me.

Sweet Lord, you have looked into my eyes,
Kindly smiling, you've called out my name.
On the sand I've abandoned my small boat;
Now with you, I will seek other seas.

Lenten Learning Week 3

Kathy: Last week we learned epidemics of the water-borne bacteria causing cholera and typhoid led to recognizing the necessity of proper sewage systems and clean water supplies. When and how were vaccines against viruses discovered?

Dr. Jim: It all began with an observation by a man named Edward Jenner in the late 1700's and the deadly small pox virus. The earliest evidence of skin lesions resembling those of smallpox is found on faces of mummies

from the time of the 18th and 20th Egyptian Dynasties (1570–1085 BC).^{1[1]} Expanding trading routes was the cause of its spread from one continent to another. Over the centuries small pox has wiped out entire civilizations, native colonies, entire societies. For instance, when the Spanish invaded the 'New World', back in the early 1520's, small pox wiped out every Aztec citizen due to the lack of immunity, and exterminated an entire nation. Similarly in Canada, 95% of Indigenous peoples were eradicated, not by gunfire, but by small pox and tuberculosis. In the 20th century, small pox continued to kill 300 million people a year. Finally, the World Health Organization (WHO) determined to eradicate small pox and set up a global vaccination campaign. In 1980 WHO declared small pox an eradicated disease. This global campaign meant Public Health Services became a reality throughout most of the world.

The smallpox vaccine was first introduced by Edward Jenner in 1796. For many years, Jenner had heard the tales that dairymaids were protected from smallpox naturally after having suffered from cowpox. After deliberately infecting a boy with cowpox, he discovered the boy was then immune to an exposure of small pox. The cowpox not only protected against smallpox but also could be transmitted from one person to another as a deliberate mechanism of protection. It was not received very well in the first years. Many refused to take the small pox vaccine - developed from cowpox, for fear of growing horns and making cow noises, even that it was 'unChristian' because it came from an animal. Refusal to get the Covid 19 vaccine is also evident in today's pandemic, for all kinds of nuanced reasons.

Jenner's vaccine has become a model for the eradication of many other viruses.

In 1810, his oldest son, Edward, died of tuberculosis. His sister Mary died the same year and his sister Anne 2 years later. In 1815, his wife, Catherine, died of tuberculosis. He would die of a massive stroke in 1823 at 73 years of age.

^{2[1]} <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1200696/> National Library of Medicine