

“On the Road with Jesus!” Lent – 2025

By Eric Markman

As we move into Lent (6 weeks in length culminating in Palm Sunday) we begin a journey with Jesus to Passover in Jerusalem and ultimately to his death on the cross on Good Friday.

It is probably best to start a week earlier with Transfiguration Sunday (Luke 9:28-43). Where, on the mountain top Jesus meets with the two great prophets of the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah, they discuss Jesus’ exodus from this part of his ministry in Jerusalem (the crucifixion). After this event he heads down the mountain with his face toward Jerusalem. And at this juncture we mark the beginning of Lent with Ash Wednesday.

On **Ash Wednesday** we mark our foreheads with ashes (ashes to ashes, dust to dust). The ashes are the remains of the Palm Sunday from the year before when Jesus was greeted with joy and great fanfare and by Good Friday the crowds shouted, “Crucify him!”

Let us pray: Dear Lord like the crowds that cheered you on Sunday and jeered on Friday we too are fickle. We place our faith in you, until things go wrong. Then we ask why? We question your presence with us, and your purpose for our lives. As we start on this journey with you toward the cross, we ask that you open our eyes to see the purpose and reason for this journey. Amen.

Song “The Long and Winding Road” - <https://shorturl.at/jtmd7>

Week 1.

As we move into the first Sunday of Lent, we read Luke 4:1-13 “The Temptations of Jesus.” Jesus has just been in the wilderness for 40 days (a complete time) with nothing to eat when he is tempted by the devil. This takes place early in his ministry and prepares him for all that would come his way and all the things that might move him off the journey toward the cross.

Prayer: Deep Hope and Well of Wisdom, our hearts are so often weak. We find ourselves hit by crisis and we find no purpose to what we are experiencing. Help us to know that even in these most difficult times you walk with us. And help us to understand that even in the most difficult times we can gain understanding and strength. As these temptations prepared Jesus for his ministry, may we also find that our crisis can deepen our faith, strengthen our resolve, and help us live lives of hope and meaning. Amen.

Song: “Many Rivers to Cross” - <https://shorturl.at/RHVre>

Week 2.:

Psalm 23 - This year our youth will bring us the second Sunday of Lent by celebrating the “Good Sheperd” of Psalm 23. As we journey along the road toward Jerusalem it’s good and reassuring to know that Jesus is right here to lead us as shepherds did with their sheep.

Prayer: As a shepherd Lord, we pray that you will guide us on the stoney path that is before both as we travel the road to the cross, but also in our own lives. It is so simple to wonder off the path you have for our lives, into the wilderness of the world. If we get too far off the path, we ask that you pick us up and carry us back to the path you have for us. Amen.

Song: "By the Rivers of Babylon" <https://shorturl.at/EjGsl>

Week 3.:

Luke 13:1-9 - Here we hear of the cruelty of Pilot which will be played out again in the trail of Jesus in Jerusalem when he is condemned to death on the cross. Which is then followed the parable of the fig tree - a warning of being fruitful as best we can in a world often filled with such brokenness.

Prayer: Dearest Lord, this world is your garden, a gift you have given us for us to tend. So often we abuse this garden, and all that is in it. We see those who are broken all around us, and we don't know what do. But our passage today both speak of the cruelty that is so much a part of world but also directs us to seek that which is fruitful and help bring that to blossom and to fruit that helps to feed those in need. Amen

Song: The Garden Song - <https://shorturl.at/IUcSh>

Week 4.

The Prodigal Son Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32 comes to us on the fourth Sunday in Lent.

We are now in fourth week of the Journey and as Jesus is approaching Jerusalem, we are told in Luke 14:25 that large crowds had begun to travel with him – but the question raised is how serious are those who are in the crowd? This section of Luke is filled with parables, a powerful teaching tool, but today we hear the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. Our reading starts by telling us that the tax collectors and the sinners (who is not a sinner?) had come to listen to him.

Jesus opens the parable saying: "There was a man who had two sons." Now, all the listeners know there is going to be trouble! Think, Cain and Able, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers – if you look up the stories, the brothers are deeply troubled. And the context is set. There is an older brother and a younger. And like Jacob and Esau the younger brother is the cause of trouble. He comes to his father and demands his fair share of the family's wealth. Remarkably the father relents and gives him his share. (The listeners would be shocked! The father should have said no, for in that time only the older brother would be line to inherit the estate. Not only that, but the estate would not be passed on until the father was dead, so the younger son is saying that the father is dead to him!)

The younger son takes the money and goes off to dissolute living. Finally going so low, that he is feeding the pigs and eating their food. (He is Jewish, and pigs are completely unclean – he has hit the very bottom!) The listeners are thinking he has gotten what he deserves! But wait there is more – the younger son finally comes to his senses and decides to go home and knows by luck

alone will his father allow him to be a servant in the house. The listeners, perhaps, think the son won't be so lucky.

But what is unexpected happens! It seems the father has kept watch for the son's possible return. But while he is still far off the father spots him (the listeners as thinking – now he will really be shamed!), but the father filled with compassion runs to meet him! He runs for two reasons. One is he is overjoyed that the son who broke his heart is returning, but just as importantly he runs because he must get to him before the son enters the town and the other residents shame him for what he has done – for the residents are just like the listeners and perhaps like us ready to judge and condemn. But not the father, who then throws an elaborate feast to welcome the son home.

It's a wonderful story and yet it should be a troubling story. And Jesus acknowledged that. For the older son is rightfully furious. When invited to join the celebration he lets the father know how angry he is and refuses to join with everyone else. For he has been the faithful one and has never been acknowledged for his loyalty. A troubled and broken family that desperately needs to be healed. Jesus sees a troubled and broken world that desperately needs to be healed, but there is no simple way to heal our world. Another step toward Jerusalem where God's love will shine on a dark day as God's love for us will go all the way to the cross and death. But will we the listeners accept the message of compassion and grace for all people, even those we believe have broken the rules?

Prayer: Oh, loving and caring God running to greet us and all others, we come to you now on this journey and ask that you will open our eyes to see the depth of your love. That you will open our hearts to welcome the kind of compassion that defines who you are. We travel this road with Jesus, but it scares us. We want simple solutions to the very complex problems that grip our world. Your love, a love that will not turn from the cross, that will not turn its back on anyone is the only solution, but we don't know if we have that kind of strength. Be with us on this journey with your son. Amen

Song: The Prodigal Son - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=humDgJ-SmHI>

Even the Rolling Stones found this message to be important!

Week 5.

On the fifth Sunday of Lent we leave the Gospel of Luke and read from the Gospel of John 12:1-8. In this reading we are only 6 days from Passover in Jerusalem. Jesus, and his disciples, are guests at Bethany in the house of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. Only days before this Jesus had raised Lazarus from death. Dinner is being served. It is a dinner of celebration and thanksgiving for Jesus' gift of life to Lazarus. It is also a dinner of deep consternation for Jesus will leave the house and head to Jerusalem, where everyone in the house knows the outcome will not be good. Mary is overcome with joy, amazement, and love and deep fear for this man who has changed their lives and is heading for great trouble in Jerusalem. Suddenly she breaks open a jar of costly nard (a wonderful ointment) and anoints his feet and wipes his feet with her hair. An odd anointing for

she should have anointed his head, not his feet. Jesus then confirms how strange this may seem for he adds she has prepared me for my death!

Judas then strongly objects to what Mary has done for as the Bible tells us, Judas' love was for money and not for Jesus.

Mary has put all her hope, love and care for a man who will shortly die. Often putting our hope in money and physical things may seem like a smarter choice than having faith in Jesus. This passage sets a choice before us: what will we love first money or faith in Christ?

Let us Pray: Creator God you watch us and you see how we often find assurance in what we own and the physical things of this world. Help us to first and foremost put our faith in Jesus Christ. The one who heads to Jerusalem to seek hope for all and lay his life down to show that not even death and break God's love for us. Like Mary help us to love your son with from the very depth of our souls. Amen.

Song: I Don't Know How to Love Him (from Godspell): <https://shorturl.at/M8Dlu>

Week 6:

Luke 19:28-40 - **The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem!**

And what an entry it was. The crowds cheered and lay down their coats and cut palm branches to welcome him and lay down a "red carpet." An entry fit for a conquering king! But how strange. Jesus rides on a colt, not a war horse. Jesus rides with only with his cloak, not armor. Jesus has no sword and no army marches behind him. The crowds make such a racket that the pharisees become afraid and ask Jesus to silence them. And Jesus responds – that even the stones would shout out! However, we know only too well that this joyous greeting will soon fade and shouts of crucify him will ring through the city and by Friday Jesus will carry his own cross to Golgotha.

The people of Jerusalem in the other Gospels shouted "Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" The crowds believed that Jesus was the conquering hero. That he would do as they so deeply wanted and drive the Romans out of Israel. But he did not – and the palms that were so carefully laid before him, become the ashes of crucifixion.

And so, we too can find our faith fading as what we hope for does not come to pass. For the Christian faith we take the palms we wave on Palm Sunday and burn them for the ashes we use on Ash Wednesday acknowledging our weaknesses and lack of faith but also preparing for Lent once again. The Christian year is a cycle every year we come back to this long and winding road of Lent. We acknowledge our brokenness and the shortness of our lives, "Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust." And as we enter Holy Week we also prepare for Good Friday and Jesus' death on the cross and the death of God's love expressed in his son, Jesus Christ. With Lent and Good Friday, we acknowledge that only God can redeem our world and bring back faith, hope, and love. And so we long for an answer and pray the on Easter Sunday morning it will come.

Let us pray: Loving God, we look out upon our world, and we see deep cruelty and a sense of hopelessness. And yet we have placed our faith in you and we know deep in our hearts you will

not disappoint. We are now coming to the end of Lent, and we see that the road ahead for Jesus ends only in the cross. The most hateful and degrading symbol of the Roman Empire. We are stunned that Jesus clearly chooses to complete his journey by fully emptying himself in you and trusting that not even death can kill the love you have for this world. We ask that you strengthen our faith as we walk through this upcoming week and dance to the end of love - Christ's death on the cross. Amen.

For the closing song I have chosen to "Dancing to the End of Love." The song was written by Leonard Cohen and it remembers that while the Nazi's killed millions of Jews in the gas chambers they made other Jews play music just outside the crematoriums! Sung by Madeleine Peyroux a haunting rendition of a song that warms us where we don't want to go ever again!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9qLFVPxuakw>