

(Lent and Easter is different each year depending on our circumstances in life. The journey is both personal and communal and its nature as a pathway is circular – inviting us to become more fully developed human beings each time we retrace it.)

(The slide coming onto the screen is a painting by Nick Andrew)

Two kinds of journeys - Lent and East are two kinds of journeys.

Lent is primarily an inward journey.

Easter is primarily an outward journey.

There is this community (this group of people) that followed Jesus
and they are drawn toward Jerusalem.

Then they will eventually be sent outward into the world –
by the power of the Holy Spirit - after Easter – after Pentecost.

That is the outward story.

Each person would have their inward journey.

The individual journeys are all different – just like ours.

Our individual stories depend on what's happening in our lives –
where our growth has been - or lack of it –

depending on what has happened since the last time around –
the last season of Lent and Easter -

and the opportunities we have had that grow our perspectives on the world.

Let's consider it - like being on a path -

Try and picture ourselves on a path – a kind of circular path -
circling in and then circling back out.

Growing – especially growing spiritually – is always a going in and out – circling back.

It might be a winding and crisscrossing pathway
such as in the painting by Nick Andrew – on the screen you see before you.

(painting appears on screen)

The artist's pathway beckons us to go deep into the woods – draws us in.

Doesn't it?

And then it calls us back out of the woods – light is pushing back out –
it pushes the viewer back out.

The artist describes his process as painting – then stopping – then coming back again
to see what is different – what has changed.

He comes back to the same location over and over to observe changes.

Let's think about using this action of coming back around -

whether in a circular or crisscrossing manner -

as we observe and live Lent once again.

My ski instructor is patiently teaching me to create circles and arcs
in such a way as to leave clear tracks – reducing each time the amount of noise -
the amount of chatter – smearing – sudden jagged splintering –
of the natural arc that gravity and the shape of the ski – want to give me.
What looks so easy as the master does it – takes so much practice for the student.

It is spiritual direction on the snow – to me.

Sometimes I will work on a message for you early in the week -
and struggle with the meaning – the point – the spiritual principle.
Then I give it a little time – and life demonstrates it right before my eyes.
You might have examples of how that kind of thing happens for you.



The journey of Lent and Easter is spiritual direction.
Our journey at Lent always takes us to Jerusalem – how many times?
How many times have you been on this journey to Jerusalem
to witness Jesus' death on the cross -
or the death of something in your life – the surrender of something -
in service to something else.

We might also use this jagged path of *the painting* to reflect on other paths of our lives.

It could be a frightening path you've walked – some time or another.

It could be joyful and adventurous path.

What if you imagine that this path is the one
on which Jesus meets you –
giving you that assurance you have always wanted -
giving you the peace you have longed for – the hope?
encouraging you to engage in life with everything you have in you.



The pathway always takes us back to the man who walked with his disciples around Galilee –
teaching – healing – catching the attention of many.

He is the man who teaches his disciples that there is suffering to be had
when we confront society and culture with its excesses and its injustices.

That was the conversation we read about today.



There was something so compelling about Jesus
that people were already placing an identity on him
that connected him with God - Son of Man.

Bishop John Spong, suggests that Son of Man means what it does in the Book of Daniel -
a supernatural being who would come from heaven.

The Son of Man would be important at the end of time – the final judgment.

Let's just say they thought the kingdom was breaking in on life.

Even then Jesus was seen as more than human.

He was seen as the source of wholeness.

Surely the writers of our gospels were trying to find language
that was big enough to describe the experience people had had with Jesus.¹

Spong describes, Jesus' life was one in which
love was perceived to transform the unloved.

There was an acceptance that healed the pain of rejection -
a wholeness that overcome brokenness -

and a life that was expanded until it transcended every limit.²

Do you see how the opposites come together?

That is pretty amazing – hard to find the words.
He was a fully developed self – I believe that is what we would call it.
Surely he was so at home with himself – so healthy in body, mind, and spirit -
that people saw the divine reflected in him.
And the writers found words to convey that very thing -
when Mark wrote about it some 50 to 60 years later.

Jesus was explaining – I believe in our reading today -
how opposites come together in the spiritual life
and how it is almost foreign to everyday thinking.

“For those who want to save their life will lose it,
and those who lose their life for my sake, will save it.”

“If any want to become my followers,
let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”
There is truth to that.

That is why we take this journey – we want to grow ourselves. -
not only because it is important for us personally – but because we are the church.
And we have a role in the world.

The church is the one who will speak up – needs to speak up – for peace – for justice -
for those who are oppressed – and walked upon.

The church – but not just the church – needs to be there
when the vested interests of society are so much more powerful.

Sometimes it has – and sometimes it has not.

But that is its role – I believe.



We are involved in those things as United Methodists – but that work often seems far away.
Really is not so far away – if we follow it – let it be a part of our life –
our prayer life - or even go be a part of it – as a volunteer in mission.

There is one example in the bulletin insert today of the work of the
United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR)
We had Janet Lewis here last night – one of our three United Methodist missionaries
working in Israel and Palestine. We support her in our wider mission.



Then there is the personal part – the personal spirituality – how we grow our souls.
Let's call that becoming a fully developed self.
We have this thing we call ego that often gets in the way.
Ego is what makes us afraid – causes us to defend ourselves more than we ever should need to.
Ego wants to control more than we really need to do.
Peter wanted Jesus to take control of the situation.
Ego and God – ego and the divine energy – have a hard time co-existing.
Ego has a hard time letting the future in – being open.
Ego has a terrible time with faith.
And being open to the future is faith – partly – the outward journey.

The journeys of Lent and Easter are simultaneously inward and outward -
Individually - we examine our hearts and minds to see how much room there is this year
to be open to something powerful.
That might be where that light is on the other side of the trees in the painting.

I invite you to reflect on your own two journeys this year
and what you might learn that you were not ready for last year.
It might be about your relationship with Christ.
Or it might be something else – like finding some of those things people saw in Jesus -
love that transforms a lack of love -
acceptance that heals rejection -
wholeness that overcome brokenness -
and life that seems to transcend the odds.



This Thursday night
we will be trying to learn more about social justice as part of God's vision -

Two Journeys – based on Mark 8:31-38
Aspen Community UMC
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in *Living the Questions*.

How can we balance our faith with our action?

We will share some food and fellowship and conversation and you are invited.

Think about the journeys you are on in your life.

Lent and Easter can be a time to learn to live life more fully -
negotiate the bumps and steepes of life in a little different way.

Let the story of Jesus – the story of Peter – and the journey to Jerusalem
be something important for you this year as you let it be a part of your life.

¹ John Spong. *Jesus for the Non-Religious.*, p. 178.

² Ibid.