



Reflections on the journey to Jerusalem

A Glen Elm Youth Group Guide
Spring 2020

Introduction:

We're on our way to Jerusalem!

Not really. No one is going anywhere these days! 😞

No, we're going to have to flex our imagination muscles for this one. This is a journey we'll take together in our minds and hearts. **Ready? Let's go!**

As you settle into your airplane seat ("Hmmm, surprisingly spacious!") and start munching on some salty snacks ("These pretzels are making me thirsty!") you might begin to wonder: **Why Jerusalem? Why now?**

To answer those questions, I'm gonna need to tell you a story...

There was this time when Jesus was walking down the road – the road leading to... you guessed it! Jerusalem – when he turned to his disciples, walking along behind him, and asked them to shoot him straight.

"Who do you think I am?"

"Well," they began to pipe up, "some think maybe the second coming of John the Baptist, or Elijah, or another one of the prophets..."

"I know, I know, I know," interjected Jesus, "I've heard *their* endless speculating. But what about *you*? Who do *you* think I am?"

Peter steps up (if you know anything about Peter, you can hardly be surprised that it'd be him who'd open his big mouth first!): "You are the Christ – the Messiah, the Chosen One, the one specially anointed to do God's work."

"Right you are, Peter. Well done!" Jesus replies, and then turns to continue down the road.

We can imagine that Peter felt mighty tickled with himself as he set off in Jesus' footsteps. Maybe his mind was filled with visions of Jesus sat upon a glimmering throne in Jerusalem (that was where they were headed, after all) having kicked those stinkin' Romans in the behind and sent them running back the way they came from (that was what the Christ – the Chosen One – was supposed to do, after all). And, sitting next to Jesus, on an only-slightly-less-glimmering throne... Peter – the Rock, Jesus' right-hand man.

"Peter. Earth to Peter!" Jesus' voice shook him from his glimmering daydream. "Peter, I have one more thing to tell you. This is what it means to be God's Chosen One: I am going to die, Peter. I'm gonna suffer, be rejected, and then die. That is where *this* road is headed."

“Wait! What?! That’s crazy talk, Jesus. Have you lost your mind? What about the stinkin’ Romans? What about my throne... er, I mean *your* throne? Surely this road does not end in death!”

Jesus wheels around again, but this time there’s fire in his eyes...

(*Nerd Alert!* Ok, for all you LOTR fans out there, I like to imagine this like Gandalf rearing up all medieval scary in Bilbo’s living room: “Bilbo Baggins!!! I’m not trying to rob you...” You know what I’m talkin’ about!)

“Get outa here, Satan!” Jesus fires. (Satan? Ouch! That one stings a little, Jesus.)

He continues, “Give your head a shake, Peter! You’re not thinking about God’s way, so forget about your visions of glimmering thrones. There’s a road that leads to life, but it’s not what you’d expect: the road to life leads *through* death.”

Peter, feeling a little more sheepish than tickled now, continues down the road in Jesus’ footsteps, and we can imagine that his head must have been spinning: **Life through death?** What on earth could that mean? Where on earth is this guy taking us?”

Ever since Jesus first walked that dusty road, his disciples have been invited to follow him on his journey to Jerusalem: **The Way of the Cross**. They have done so especially at *this* time – in a season called Lent.

Throughout the long history of the church, Christians have set apart this time of year as a season called ‘Lent’ – the word literally meaning ‘lengthening’, which refers to changes that are presently taking place in the world outside our doors.

Have you noticed? ...the ‘lengthening’ of our days? The sun is rising earlier each morning (it might already be blazing high in the sky by the time you wake up on some of these non-school days!) and setting later every evening.

And have you noticed what else is happening?

It might be hard to see right now, but **life** is returning to our cold and barren land. The promise of spring is faithfully held in each tree bud, patiently waiting to burst into blossom, and in each seed or bulb lying still-dormant beneath the warming soil. Before long, as each day continues to lengthen, we will be surrounded by full-blown resurrection – the miracle of life reborn all around us, shouting this message from every stalk and stem and blade and blossom: **Life follows death!**

Do you hear it? This message of hope ringing out in the world around us: **Life follows death!** The Christian story – the story of Jesus – echoes the same: **Life follows death!** Death does not hold the final word. *Life* is what we’re made for – vibrant, flourishing, everlasting, **Life!**

But, mysteriously, the road to life travels a most unexpected course; Jesus' words to his disciples, on that dusty road so long ago, remind us that the road to life leads *through* death.

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.”

So, here's your invitation: Let's take this journey together – following Jesus on his **Way of the Cross**. Over the coming weeks we'll read a series of stories from the Gospel of Mark, each of which occur on Jesus' journey toward Jerusalem. Hearing each story, we'll then pause to ponder what we might learn about Jesus, about ourselves, and about how on earth we could possibly find **Life through death**.

Ready? Let's go!

Instructions:

In each of the four lessons that follow, we will begin in prayer, saying:

God, we thank you that you are living and active, that you are present here with us, and that you reveal yourself by your Word and Spirit. Lord, give us eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts that understand what you want to teach us about yourself, and about our lives in you. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Next, we will read one of the following stories from the Gospel of Mark:

- 1. The 'cost' of being a disciple** (Mark 10:17-31)
- 2. The coming king** (Mark 11:1-11)
- 3. A beautiful thing** (Mark 14:1-11)
- 4. Death and Resurrection** (Mark 15:33 – 16:8)

As you read or listen to each story, ponder the following general questions, along with the additional questions included with each lesson:

- Is anything unclear in the story? What questions arose in your mind as you read or listened?
- What do you learn about Jesus in this story? Is that what you expected to see, or did it come as a surprise?
- How did the people around Jesus respond to him in this story? How might you have responded if you had been there?

After taking time to respond to the questions, we will conclude with a short prayer. Take a few moments to quiet your mind and heart, then express what you would like to say to God (and don't forget to listen too:) ***The Lord is here; His Spirit is with us!***