

“Journey and Visitation”

Luke 19:41-48

Sermon for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity 2022; August 21, 2022

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

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In the Gospel reading today from Luke’s Gospel, we find Jesus on the verge of entering Jerusalem. Then He entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. He drove out of the temple the merchants who were selling sacrificial animals in the temple area. We learn from the other Gospels that there were also people running a currency exchange in the temple—the moneychangers (Mat. 21:12).

The temple dedicated to God’s name looked more like a marketplace, a bank, and stockyards than a house of prayer, as Jesus calls it. The sellers and money changers were also making a profit off of selling the animals for the sacrifices prescribed in the law of Moses and exchanging currency.

The problem with this was not simply making a profit but making a profit off of what was really a captive audience. The people were compelled by the law of Moses and their faith to purchase the animals for the sacrifices and to exchange money to do so, if they had come from some other part of the world. In other words, the sellers and money changers were taking advantage of God’s requirement and the faith of the people. So Jesus says that they had made the temple into a den of robbers, doing this with respect to the things of God (Luke 19:46).

The chief priests, scribes and Pharisees, and prominent persons from among the people, had fallen into practices that had become habits that served their own interests and were not consistent with what the temple was there for. As the King of Jerusalem, as the Lord of the Temple, Jesus had to restore the temple to its appropriate purpose, a house of prayer.

In so doing, however, He was also surpassing the temple with a different temple. This temple is Jesus Himself. This new temple was also the people who would become His own through faith in Him as Savior from sin and death, and from God’s just judgement against sin.

In addition to Jesus cleansing the temple, there are a couple of other things going on with Jesus approaching Jerusalem and entering it. One thing is reaching a destination. The other thing is visitation. Jesus refers to visitation in verse 44 of the Gospel reading, when He says, speaking to Jerusalem: “Because you did not know the time of your visitation” (Luke 19:44).

The theme of destination involves being on a journey. When Jesus arrived at Jerusalem that day, He had reached His destination. Jesus being on a journey to Jerusalem, as His destination, is a prominent feature of Luke’s Gospel. Luke sets everything that Jesus says and does in the chapters in between Luke 9 and Luke 19 within the framework of Jesus being on the way to Jerusalem. Luke states this clearly at chapter 9, verse 51. There it says: “When the days drew near for [Jesus] to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51 ESV). Set His face could be taken as decisively determined; single purpose. A little later Jesus said, in response to hearing that Herod wanted to kill him: “I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the following day, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem” (Luke 13:33 ESV).

This “being taken up” that Jesus mentions is a reference to His ascension to the right hand of God after His death and resurrection. It can be taken as shorthand for the whole thing: His sacrificial death, resurrection, and then ascension. All of this was going to be accomplished at Jerusalem.

So Jesus set His face to go there. This was His mission, His destiny, His purpose for coming in our flesh. So in His ministry, He is on a journey to a destination. He is determined to reach that destination, not being side-tracked, not losing sight of His reason for being and the goal.

Tawnya and I decided to go to Minnesota for a few days for vacation a couple of weeks ago. Imagine that when we got to Omaha, traveling along on interstate 80, and saw the signs for interstate 29 going south to Kansas City, that we said: “Hey, lets go south to Kansas City,” even though we were on the way to Minneapolis. That would be a pretty strange way of going to Minneapolis in limited time. One could say we would be getting side-tracked and losing our focus if we did that.

So Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem. He did not get side-tracked. Today we see Him reaching His destination. That Jesus was on a journey to His destination is also important for us to see ourselves on a journey in Jesus to the new Jerusalem. We are on our way.

Jesus being on the way to Jerusalem puts many things that Jesus said and did after Luke 9 verse 51 in a certain light. One place is the story of Mary and Martha. That story starts out with this phrase: “Now as they went on their way” (Luke 10:38 ESV). This is Luke’s way of telling us that the story of Mary and Martha is to be understood in light of being on the journey.

In the story, Martha was busy making dinner and setting the table and straightening the house and all that. Mary was sitting at Jesus’ feet listening to His teaching. Jesus was there. Martha was upset with Mary. But what could be more important than having Jesus and listening to His teaching? Precisely, that is the point, as we are on the journey. Nothing in this world is permanent in comparison to the glory that awaits us at our destination. Jesus and His word get us there through faith. Since we are on the journey in Jesus to our destination, nothing is more important than having Jesus and listening to His teaching. So Jesus says: “Blessed . . . are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Luke 11:28 ESV).

Let’s talk about visitation, our other theme. Visitation in general is a concept in the Bible that means the coming of God in God’s presence and decisive action. Specifically, it is the coming of God’s decisive action in the Messiah, in whom God would accomplish all of His purposes in relation to God’s kingdom and with respect to all people.

In short, this visitation is Jesus Himself. In Him God is present for us to find Him. In Him God’s decisive saving action and decisive judgment take place. In Jesus God comes with eternal destiny, with eternal salvation. He is how we find God this side of eternity.

But this also means that God’s visitation in Jesus surpasses the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus spoke about the queen of the South going to hear King Solomon speak because she thought hearing his wisdom that important. Jesus said, “[S]omething greater than Solomon is here” (Luke 11:31 ESV). Jesus spoke about how the people of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah—after the whale had spit Jonah up on the land once again. Jesus said: “[S]omething greater than Jonah is here” (Luke 11: 32 ESV).

This “something greater” was Jesus Himself. He demonstrated it in what He said and in what He did; in His death; and in His rising to life again from death.

This something greater is the one who is the wisdom of God; who is the word of God in person, in the flesh. For the people of Israel at that time: He was standing among them. He came to Jerusalem that day, walking on His feet among them; being one of them; speaking to them; interacting with them. For us, He is present with us, whose presence is known by His word and Sacrament, in His Spirit.

God’s visitation is Jesus. We embrace Him in sorrow over sin and in seeking God’s gracious favor. You embrace Him in faith in the good news that your sins are forgiven because

He died for you; that God's grace and love is for you because He died and rose; that He has won eternal life and resurrection for you, because He died and rose for you.

These things are brought about in us and delivered to us through Jesus' word and Sacrament, the things of His house, you being His house, the new temple of God, through repentance and faith by the operation of His Spirit.

When He entered Jerusalem, Jesus wept over it because they were missing God's visitation. Jesus spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem because they did not receive Him as the visitation of God. So another aspect of God's visitation must be spoken, because Jesus spoke it. In not receiving Jesus as God's visitation, all is lost. In receiving Him, that is believing in Him, as we are on the way in Him, all is gained in His kingdom.

You live in God's visitation because you live in Jesus through believing Him. And Jesus as the visitation of God is life for you and deliverance from death.

So let us think of ourselves through faith in Jesus as on the journey in Him to the new Jerusalem as He had set His face to Jerusalem. There He won for us our destiny, in His suffering, death, and resurrection. We are on the journey in Him as He now lives for us at the right hand of God; where He lives for us as our strength and encouragement along the way. Let us rejoice in the fact that in Jesus, we have the visitation of God with us and for us for salvation, living and powerful, and leading us on to our eternal destination with our King in His glory. Thanks be to God. Amen.