

Over the next few weeks, God's Word leads us into the question of purpose.

What is Jesus' purpose?

What is our reason for being?

What is the aim and goal of our life?

How do we know we are fulfilling our true purpose?

While many try to set the agenda for our lives – parents, schools, workplace, society -- our true purpose is given by God our Creator.

We are truly happy when we are fulfilling God's purpose for us.

We come to know our purpose through Jesus, who reveals God to us.

Jesus' purpose is to undo the sin of Adam and Eve,

destroy death,

break down the barriers to Life,

and restore humanity to God's abundant life for which we were created.

Everything Jesus is and does fulfills his purpose and shows us ours.

Last week we saw Jesus break down the barriers to God's life for a man who was on the fringes of society,
teaching us to do the same in our relationships.

Today, we see Jesus traveling to Jerusalem for the fulfillment of his purpose

– his own death and resurrection
to break the bonds of the evil one,
and to crush hell underfoot.

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Not every journey Jesus makes is such a journey.

- Sometimes, he just started out going from town to town in a particular area, and then moved on
 - – an itinerant preacher and healer.

On those occasions, his purpose was more immediate
– he was embodying the life-giving presence of God in a particular location at a particular time.

He dealt with situations as he encountered them

- the lepers,
- the woman at the well,
- the crowds on whom he had compassion.

He responded on the spot and with immediate purpose to give God's healing and life.

I am the resurrection and the life, he said to Mary & Martha – not I will be someday,

but right here, right now, I am life for you.

But the journey Jesus makes in today's Gospel reading is to fulfill his purpose in the future.

It is a journey to accomplish a plan established from the beginning of God's love for humanity.

We know this because of the language "he set his face to go to Jerusalem"

This is descriptive of purpose, of resolve,

of unswerving determination to take certain steps.

The body will go in the direction it faces

- so , when a destination is established,
- we square our feet and shoulders,
- stick out our chin,
- focus our eyes,
- and move with purpose in that direction.

This is what it means to “set one’s face toward” something.

In Jerusalem, Jesus had a purpose to fulfill that was bigger than any local instance,

This purpose was for all people, in all times, and in all places.

In Jerusalem, he would establish himself as the Passover Lamb who takes away the sins of the whole world

--people of every time and place,

past present, and future

and leave his disciples a meal by which to share his life and salvation – in every time and place until he returns.

In Jerusalem, he would be handed over to sinners, condemned to death,

and executed as an innocent man for the sins of all the guilty. —including you and me.

- By his death, he would destroy death and its power to keep us away from God’s life.
- And by his resurrection and ascension, he would be given authority over all creation.

It was this final consummation of his ascension to the position of authority with God the Father

that Jesus sought with resolve to experience.

Why? So that he could save us without regard to the barriers of time and space.

So that he could show up anywhere at anytime and in multiple places at once

to do God's kingdom work

of breaking down the barriers to God's life

– even here, at St. Peter's, this morning.

So, when the time had come for his ascension to the Father, Jesus went purposefully to Jerusalem to everything that would lead to his being received into heaven as the promised Messiah risen from the dead.

Nothing would stop him from fulfilling God's eternal purpose.

But what does this have to do with us?

Let's find ourselves in this story.

There are 4 possibilities:

1. The called and chosen disciples who have dedicated their lives to following Jesus
2. The Samaritans who rejected Jesus because of his purpose

3. The man who happened to come across Jesus and volunteered to serve before knowing what it would cost him and was turned away because he wouldn't pay the price;
4. And the man along the way that Jesus called to follow him, but who wanted to take care of his family first and was turned away for lack of commitment.

Let's look first at the Samaritans – they rejected Jesus on political grounds –

They believed the temple should be on Mt. Gerezim, not in Jerusalem, so by purposely going to Jerusalem, Jesus showed himself to be of a different political stance, and they rejected him.

If you or I are like them,

- only participating in the church if you agree with the politics of the pastor or
- insisting that the direction of the church go the way you think it should go,
- then you may discover Jesus shaking the dust off his feet at you and moving on to another town.
- Either we serve Jesus and the kingdom of heaven, or we serve ourselves – but we cannot do both.

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If you or I are like the man who volunteered to serve Jesus,

but when it came down to a matter of life and death,
refused to do what it takes, then you will be turned away from
Jesus.

It is of no use to carry a hammer and nails to a
worksit and refuse to use them – nothing will get built!

**Jesus does not need lip service, he needs workers,
people who will do what he says and follow his lead.**

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If you or I are like the man whom Jesus invited to follow him,
but had other more important things to do first, then we too will
be turned away.

Jesus wants you – your whole being and life – your heart
and soul and mind and strength.

Just as the farmer cannot plow a straight line by looking
behind him,

**so the disciple cannot follow Jesus if looking back at the
past or from side to side at things that seem more attractive
or important.**

Jesus forces no one to follow him

– but from those who do follow him, he is looking for total commitment, not the leftovers of our lives.

He wants our full attention – he wants people who are willing to set aside everything else for the sake of living God's purpose for them.

He wants us to be disciples who have left everything to follow him – because he wants us to enjoy the life he alone gives.

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Imagine being in a park for the day

- you have a great spot by the creek where you can put your feet in the water and enjoy the waterfall.
- You have your blanket all spread out,
- your ipod queued with music
- and your tablet set with your book to read.
- It is perfect – except for one thing.
 - You have nothing but one piece of beef jerky and one juice pack to eat and drink and no money for the ice cream truck or concession stand.

Then somebody comes along and tells you there is a free all-you-can-eat picnic on the other side of the park for anybody who comes.

Wouldn't it be worth it to pack up your blanket and tunes,

dry your feet and put your sandals on in order to accept this wonderful invitation?

Our lives apart from Jesus –however good they may seem – are always lacking in the very thing that sustains life.

But Jesus comes to offer us total life so that we might give life to the world.

That is the purpose we were created for.

That is the purpose God called us to in Baptism.

That is the purpose that brings joy and peace in our lives.

What will you decide?

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Now, as we think about which character in the story we are, let us take heart –

We get to leave yesterday behind.

We get to leave whatever we have done this morning behind.

What matters right now is who Jesus is calling us to be in this moment.

What matters right now is what Jesus is offering today to those who follow him.

What matters right now is how we respond today to Jesus' invitation to follow him.

- For whether it is the knock on the door of our heart as depicted in our window,
- Or the call to rearrange our priorities to be with Jesus,
- or the invitation to leave behind the worry about the past and future **because his life is greater than all that,**

Jesus stands before us now

- not to judge us for what we were yesterday
- but to invite us to follow him today and tomorrow.

Jesus asks us now whether we will accept God's purpose for our life

- to be those who are the hands and feet of the Savior
- to be life for the world.

By setting our face to go with Jesus

- to the cross, to the tombs,
- to resurrection life and the eternal realm of God.

By choosing to live with Christ in the community of faith he calls the church.

By making his ways our ways and his desire our desire.

In the name. . . .