

Please pray with me. May the meditations of my heart and the words of my lips be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, and may you add a blessing to the hearing and understanding of this message today.

After his triumphal entry into Jerusalem with crowds shouting Hosanna, Jesus spends several days teaching in the temple. He is speaking to the hearts and desires of people looking for a Savior, for reassurance and for relief from hardship, pain and suffering.

Earlier in the gospel, he has taught a lot about living life and now today, we hear Jesus talk about 'end times'.

Jesus tells his disciples, "Beware that you are not led astray".

The original meaning for the phrase 'led astray' is to cause to wander off the path.

There is a path, Jesus says, that will take you to and through the end times and this is how you are to act and this is what you should expect. Staying on the path we will come full circle and gain our souls, Jesus says.

The path includes loving our neighbor, forgiving our enemies, sharing our coats and our resources. Greed of possessions and power lead us off the path. We are called to service of the least of these. Each of us lives these teachings out in different ways in our lives, on different paths using our God-given gifts.

Jesus tells them that it won't be easy – there will be natural disasters and they will be persecuted and betrayed. And there will always be hard times and suffering. Natural disasters will cause us to re-examine what is really important to us when we lose a home or a friend to hurricanes, earthquakes.

The persecutions of today are different than what Luke's community faced – at least in this country, Christians are not generally persecuted for our beliefs –

we do not literally fear for our lives.  
The reality of today is that we confront discerning between  
wants and needs,  
keeping God first in our lives,  
feeling enlivened by our relationship with God.

Jesus gave us tools to keep us from being led astray.  
He told us and showed us about prayer.  
He taught us how to pray.  
Jesus gathered a group of followers together, not just one,  
but a group and they were strength for one another.  
On our journeys it is important to gather a group of people  
committed to helping us discern and stay on our path also.

Sometimes we find we *have* wandered from the path,  
we find that we have lost our way –  
and we ask ourselves, is this what I am supposed to be doing,  
how I am supposed to be living?

When we realize the answer to the question:  
Is this what I was born to do is “no, or maybe not” then  
we need to tweak the path a little bit.  
Sometimes it doesn’t mean that we have to change our entire lives,  
but just get our lives more balanced.  
Is there enough family time?  
Am I giving enough time to my neighbor?

Maybe your path and my path mean that we will find a way to  
sponsor Katya and her family for her work visa.  
Maybe your path will lead you to begin tutoring.  
Maybe our path will lead to supporting those with dementia.

Our individual paths are simultaneously unique and communal.  
Our converged paths form the path of Covenant into the world.  
A path that encounters the pain and suffering of others and  
seeks to contribute to their healing and the healing of this world.

Being led astray sometimes means taking an easier, softer way.  
We want peace; we want harmony in our relationships.  
We want family and friends to listen and agree that  
Jesus is the Savior for the world.  
We want policies to be guided by  
love for our neighbor and justice for all where  
no one lives on the streets or goes hungry.  
We lament that lives and homes are lost to  
hurricanes and earthquakes and we want it all to end.  
Jesus tells us that it won't.  
In spite of all of this, we are to remain on the path and  
not be led astray to become idle or to predict the end time,  
or to bury our head in the sand or  
avert our eyes when we walk past another in need.

Jesus' path brought him full circle from the age of 12 when  
he was found by his frantically searching parents at the temple,  
responding simply with  
"Didn't you know that I would be in my father's house?".  
He now teaches as a spell binding rabbi speaking of the end times,  
foretelling the reality the listeners would encounter and  
the reality of eternal life.  
For 3 years Jesus wandered in the countryside outside of Jerusalem,  
but eventually he needed to go into the heart of Jerusalem to  
stay on the path.  
And into the heart he went, riding in among palms waving and  
shouts of hosannas that only made the authorities decide to kill him  
for the threat that he posed to them.  
But Jesus was not to be deterred.  
The time had come that he had been predicting.  
There, in Jerusalem, is where Jesus will die and be given new life.

Walking along the path, following Jesus,  
we become more than just a worshipper of Jesus,  
we follow Jesus into our own Jerusalem.  
Some of us may have already encountered them –  
the times in life that were despairing and joyless.

Those places and parts of ourselves that we fear are our Jerusalem.  
The community of Covenant will also encounter Jerusalem on  
our journey following Jesus.

Like Jesus' Jerusalem, each individual Jerusalem is the place where  
we are reborn, transformed.  
What we learn from staying on the path at the  
scariest and hardest times is that the path does not end in Jerusalem.  
On our path, in Jerusalem, we are face to face with death and life and  
a resurrection experience of some aspect of our personality,  
a chapter of our life,  
or a relationship with someone else.

Taking those final steps into Jerusalem means encountering a  
death like Jesus encountered.  
Death to those parts of ourselves that hold us back,  
death to the sinfulness of our lives.  
Death to our collective fears that keep Covenant from  
faithfully carrying the gospel in a new time.  
Those last steps are scary.  
Jesus has walked them before us and he is by our side now.  
We don't go into Jerusalem alone.  
He has conquered death and gained our lives for us.

Walking in and through Jerusalem we are reborn and transformed.  
We continue on our path,  
walking with other transformed and renewed sinners working  
to bring God's love and grace to the world.  
We continue on a path joining together with  
those who have gone before us and  
those who will come after us.  
A path that began at Jesus' cross and  
our own baptismal font and  
each Sunday comes here to the table to  
share a meal and then extend outward again into the world.  
Thanks be to God. Amen.