

On Our Lent Journey: KISS – Deuteronomy 26:4-10; Luke 4:1-13
Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV – 1st Sunday of Lent (February 17) 2013

⁴ Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God.

⁵ “And you shall make response before the LORD your God, ‘A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. ⁶ And the Egyptians treated us harshly and humiliated us and laid on us hard labor. ⁷ Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. ⁸ And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders. ⁹ And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰ And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O LORD, have given me.’ And you shall set it down before the LORD your God and worship before the LORD your God.

¹ And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness ²for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. ³ The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” ⁴ And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’” ⁵ And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶ and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸ And Jesus answered him, “It is written,

“You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.”

⁹ And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written,

“He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’

¹¹ and

“On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.”

¹² And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ¹³ And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Last week, we accompanied Peter, James, and John as they went to the mountain top with Jesus, and experienced that Transfiguration moment. And we left this sanctuary, carrying the light of Christ with us into the world.

We remember, however, that when we saw Jesus divinely irradiated on the mountain, he was in discussion with Moses and Elijah, who were discussing Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem, and to crucifixion.

Lent is about a journey of preparedness for Jesus to Jerusalem. Today’s scripture lessons reminds us of how Jesus began his journey

to Jerusalem with 40 days in the desert. Lent is based upon that 40 day experience in the wilderness.

It is a time of preparation for us.

It is about a journey.

What's it like for us when we go on a journey?

When you go on a trip, how do you pack?

When you go on a journey, what's your preparation like?

Some people begin their preparation with list making.

Some people begin their packing for the trip the week before they leave – making sure that they don't forget anything.

What's it like for you when you go on a journey?

Henri Nouwen once remarked that so many people never really leave home to go on a journey because they pack all their home with them.

Imagine with me that we are headed out on a journey. We are gathered at the station with our fellow sojourners. We are waiting for our tour guide. We have thoughts of anticipation and excitement, for we do not know what lies ahead of us, but we have high expectancy that it will be a good experience.

Here comes our tour guide now. He looks at all of us and says, **“Well, we are about ready to begin. But first, we must check our luggage. Is it too heavy?”**

And then our tour guide asks us to each open our luggage up so that he can inspect it. Some of the people on the tour object to this and say that it's none of his business what we are to carry.

“Really?” is all he says. **“Let me tell you a story.”**

We turn and look at one another, and wonder: what's with this guy? We've never had a tour guide like this before.

“A wandering Aramean was my father....” begins his story. But somehow, the way he says it, we don't feel like he's telling a story

as much as it is like we are entering into a story. We are with him as he journeyed with his father, that wandering Aramean.

And, before we know it, we are traveling with him along a dusty path, going into a place where we do not know, looking for sign posts to tell us how far we have to go. Along the way, we are met with situations of danger, situations of trouble, situations of challenge.

Much of our baggage gets lost. Pretty soon, we are left with just the clothes on our back, and with one another. We are left without all the things that we had packed, which we thought would make our life comfortable on the journey. The things that we thought were necessary, we come to find out, are mostly extra weight that holds us back, that holds us down, undependable stuff upon which we have become dependent.

On our journey, we are over and over again confronted by circumstances that we are unprepared to handle. But, in each circumstance, our tour guide provides us with a way out, a way to safety, a way of getting through. We are grateful for his presence.

- But, all along the way, we keep losing more and more of the STUFF we so carefully packed.
- All along the way, we keep losing more and more of the STUFF we thought was necessary.
- All along the way, we keep letting go of more and more of the STUFF that we thought was what made life meaningful for us.

And the tour guide keeps telling us: **KEEP IT SIMPLE, SILLY!**

- **What you need most is your STORY.**
- **Your STORY is what gives you identity.**
- **Your STORY is what makes sense out of your journey.**
- **Your STORY gives you a sense of direction.**
- **Your STORY gives you enough memories of deliverance to give you hope to keep going.**

And I had a thought: if I spend all my time paying attention to other people's stories – on television, at the movies, in books – and don't pay enough attention to MY STORY and the STORY OF MY FOREBEARS, WHO LED ME ALONG THE WAY, then what will I have to be MY story when I need it?

And what story can I possibly pass on?

And the tour guide, as though he could read my mind, said **“Exactly!”**

“Most of you people” he continued, **“don’t know your own story. You haven’t paid enough attention, because you spend so much time trying to pack your suitcase, trying to live up to the Kardashian virtues of happiness by accumulation, even when you know that their story is a failure.**

“Most of you have this notion of STORY that requires you to live up to those high standards of perfection, so much that you don’t even live your life ... you only are shooting for some star – for some goal that is often not even your own -- in the future.

“And so often, it takes tragedy or loss to make you pay attention to the real value in your life – to the people around you and your relationships with them.

“You don’t have enough STORY to remind you that you don’t need to do anything to be valuable; you don’t have to accomplish anything to make you worthy.”

KEEP IT SIMPLE, SILLY and pay attention to what’s going on right now.

- **What’s in YOUR suitcase?**
- **What are you carrying that is someone else’s agenda?**
- **What are you carrying that weighs you down?**
- **What are you carrying that prevents you from paying attention to what is actually going on in front of your face?**

Have you ever observed some travelers who are so interested in taking good pictures of their journey to show others how good their trip was that they don’t even pay attention to what is happening. If their cameras somehow fail them, and the pictures are lost, they are unable to tell anyone about their journey because they were present only in their cameras.

Pay attention.

Keep It Simple, Silly.

Look for:

- The things that **make the story of your journey real,**

- The things that make the **story of your journey** real and **valuable**
- The things that make the story of your journey so real and valuable **that no one can ever take away from you**
- The things that make the story of your journey **part of the larger story**, so real and valuable that no one can ever take it away from you.
- The things that make the story of your journey part of the larger story, so real and valuable that no one can ever take it away from you **and for which you can always be grateful**
- The things that make the story of your journey part of the larger story, so real and valuable that no one can ever take it away from you, for which you can always be grateful, **and which will always provide you a future with hope, as you remember.**

Empty your suitcase and make enough room for all of that.

Leave the other stuff behind. It only gets in the way.

And ... so our journey begins.

And ... so our journey will continue.