

On Our Lent Journey: Who's the Guide? (#4 in series) – Philippians 3:4b-14
Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV – 5th Sunday of Lent (March 17) 2013

¹² So those who think they are standing need to watch out or else they may fall. ¹³ No temptation has seized you that isn't common for people. But God is faithful. He won't allow you to be tempted beyond your abilities. Instead, with the temptation, God will also supply a way out so that you will be able to endure it.

⁶ And [Jesus] told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none.⁷ And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?' ⁸ And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. ⁹ Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Lent: We're on a journey, and we are coming down the home stretch. By next Sunday, we will be marching down the hill into Jerusalem itself, waving Palm branches.

Along the way, there have been several lessons:

1. Sometimes we carry far too much baggage. I shed that great big suitcase that was almost big enough to pack a body for this lightweight one.
2. Then we learned the importance of a GPS system - keeping our eyes on the destination, and not to be distracted by the creature comforts of life.
3. In our third Sunday, the Tour Guide taught us how important it is to recognize that we travel together; we don't go it our own. Traveling together makes it much easier to handle the manure in our paths.
4. Last week we looked at the cost of the journey. Sometimes the biggest cost is letting go of thinking of things in the same way we have before; of admitting our need for, and actually accepting, the Tour Guide's help.

Good lessons we have learned together on this trip, from our tour guide. **Important lessons** we have learned together on this trip, from our tour guide.

But life - ultimately - boils down to doing some critical triaging. The hardest decisions are not choices between good and bad. Those are usually pretty easy to decide, even if not always easy to do what we know is better. The harder decisions, however, are the prioritizing between the goods.

But there are priorities. Consider this story told by Anthony deMello:

A wise old monk had reached the outskirts of the village and settled down under a tree for the night's rest, when a villager came running up to him and said, "The stone! The stone! Give me the precious stone!"

"What stone?" asked the old monk.

“Last night I had a dream, and the Lord Almighty appeared to me,” **said the villager**, “and told me that if I went to these outskirts of the village at dusk, I would find a monk who would give me a precious stone that would make me rich forever.”

The old man rummaged in his bag and pulled out a stone. **“The Lord Almighty probably meant this one,”** he said, as he handed the stone over to the villager. **“I found this on a forest path several days ago. You can certainly have it.”**

The villager gazed at the stone in wonder. It was a diamond, probably the largest one in the whole world, for it was as large as a person’s head.

She took the diamond and walked away. All night long, she tossed and turned in bed, unable to sleep. Next morning, at the crack of dawn, she found her way to the big tree on the edge of town, and woke up the monk. And she said, **“Give me the wealth that makes it possible for you to give this diamond away so easily.”** (adapted from Anthony de Mello, *The Song of the Bird*, pp. 140-41)

Good lessons we have learned together on this trip, from our tour guide. **Important lessons** we have learned together on this trip, from our tour guide.

But life - ultimately - boils down to doing some critical triaging. And more important than all the lessons taught to us by the Travel Guide on our Journey is OUR GUIDE HIMSELF.

Like Saint Paul had learned, by the stage in his life when he wrote today's scripture lesson in letter to the Philippians, I also am learning as I move these **things called days** from the **future package** to the **history box**, that priorities will change during the seasons of our life. Things that once shone like the north star begin to diminish in their twinkle factor:

- Accomplishments
- Raising our children
- Career advancement
- Travel
- Toys for children of all ages
- Education

- Respect
- Excitement
- Financial security
- Working for justice OR FOR SOME working for "just us"

The descriptions will vary based upon who is describing whom.

Physical fitness and beauty will eventually lead to trying to live independently which will lead to trying to stay alive which eventually gives way to trying to assess if my life has made a difference to ultimately trying/hoping to die well

These are all stages, waypoints in each of our journeys.

Whether we are on a Lenten Journey

or

We are looking at the lifelong journey

our priorities will change.

The one constant, the one most important and ever present part of the journey is the relationship with the Tour Guide, who is always with us.

Here we are, getting ready to encounter once more the Resurrection power of Easter. We have been denying ourselves, looking inward, preparing for the moment, once more.

What's it all mean? What is it worth?

If it's just a story of a solitary act done once in history, it's a pretty wonderful story. But it's so much more than that. Jesus' conquest of death is just the beginning – as He is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

I can hardly imagine the size and weight, splendor, and value of the diamond in that deMello story.

But I "get" the story. It's like Jesus' parables on the nature of the Kingdom of God – the pearl of great price, the treasure in the field. I "get" the point. But it's still hard to wrap my head around something that is bigger than we can ask or even imagine.

But – when the storms of life are raging – the power of the Resurrection needs to be that big to see us through.

When the times comes that the host of hell assail and my strength begins to fail – and I cannot pray as I ought – then knowing that the Spirit of the Resurrection is making sighs too deep for words for my prayers – then it's good to remember how great is this wealth that make mere diamonds pale in comparison.

*We know little
We can tell less
But one thing I know
One thing I can tell
I will see you again
in Jerusalem
Which is of such beauty
No matter what country
You come from
You will be more at home
There
Than ever with father or mother
Than even with lover or friend
And once we're within her borders
Death will hunt us in vain*

- **We're on a journey.**
- **The most important part of the journey is the Tour Guide.**
- **Our relationship with Him is more important than even all that He has to teach us.**
- **His Name is Jesus.**

And ... so our journey continues ... and we press on. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.