

Luke's Jesus is no travel guide

THE GOOD NEWS

GOD'S WORD IN EVERYDAY LIVING

By Father Paul Turner



THE TRAVEL section of your local book store isn't the first place you'd look for a copy of Luke's Gospel. Yet almost half the Gospel reads like a travelogue of the road to Jerusalem.

Luke 9:51 begins the tour: "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem."

Luke 13:22 continues the idea: "Jesus went through one town and village after another, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem."

Luke 17:11 reminds us again: "On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee."

Luke 18:31 states, "Then he took the twelve aside and said to them, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.'"

Finally in Luke 19:26, as the disciples gather palm branches to greet him at the gate, we read, "After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem."

STILL, you don't find Luke in the travel section for two very good reasons. One is the routing. Jesus starts out passing through Samaria. Later he visits Martha and Mary (10:38), who John tells us lived in Bethany, a short walk to Jerusalem. But then he's a three day's journey from the Holy City (13:31), then between Galilee and Samaria (17:11), outside Jericho (18:35), and near Jerusalem (19:11). This is like travelling from St. Joseph to Kansas City by way of Atchison, Lee's Summit, Cameron, Parkville, and Excelsior Springs. Luke's Jesus would never land a part-time job in the Triptik department of AAA travel. It makes you wonder how firmly he set his face to go to Jerusalem in the first place.

The second reason this makes a poor travelogue is that Luke's interest strays far from the scenery. This journey simply gathers several stories about Jesus: The events may have taken place in this sequence, but more likely Luke has arranged the material neither chronologically nor geographically, but thematically. From this point on, the cross looms over every story.

Next Sunday, we start following Luke's travelogue week after week through the fall. This week, however, we hear one of the last stories before the great journey begins. Today, when our church calendar returns us to Sundays in ordinary time, we hear Jesus interrogating his travelling companions (9:18-24).

"Who do you say that I am?" he asks. When Peter responds, "the Messiah of God," Jesus predicts his passion for the first time, and invites his followers to prepare for the trip by packing a peculiar piece of luggage: the cross. If you want to follow Jesus, you say yes to suffering, not just to glory.

To make the trip the disciples must first acclaim Jesus as Messiah, and they take up their cross. They must leave behind the hearsay that Jesus simply announces the Messiah and grasp the belief that he is the Messiah. These faithful descendants of Abraham and Sara must swallow hard: This is it. This is what they've been waiting for. They're no longer waiting for something better. Like them, we may recoil at a suffering Messiah, a suffering world, a crucified leader, a Church still struggling to do what's right, and so many grey areas in our personal lives, but this is our Savior. Here lies our faith.

NEXT SUNDAY, the journey begins (Lk 9:51-62). The first verse sets the tone for the whole section. Jesus "sets his face" for the mission, as the suffering servant did in Isaiah 50:7. Ball players speak of their pitcher's "game face." When he gets that look, they know he's focused on the pitch at hand.

Jesus needs that face. He stops first at Samaria, the land of outcasts, where the population rejects him. Inhospitality and stubbornness greet his first steps, but Jesus presses on. His final steps will meet the same resistance. Yet Jesus preaches to the outcast and the enemy because his mission encompasses the world.

Often our faith also struggles with a rejected, meandering Messiah.

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Daily Scripture Readings

Twelfth Sunday

In Ordinary Time
Sunday, June 25
Zechariah 12:10-11; 13:1
Psalms 63:2-6, 8-9
Galatians 3:26-29
Luke 9:18-24

Monday, June 26

Genesis 12:1-9
Psalms 33:12-13, 18-20, 22
Matthew 7:1-5

Tuesday, June 27

Genesis 13:2, 5-18
Psalms 15:2-5
Matthew 7:6, 12-14

Wednesday, June 28

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18
Psalms 105:1-4, 6-9
Matthew 7:15-20

Thursday, June 29

Acts 12:1-11
Psalms 34:2-9
2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18
Matthew 16:13-19

Friday, June 30

Genesis 17:1, 9-10, 15-22
Psalms 128:1-5
Matthew 8:1-4

Saturday, July 1

Genesis 18:1-15
(Ps) Luke 1:46-50, 53-55
Matthew 8:5-17

Thirteenth Sunday

In Ordinary Time
Sunday, July 2
1 Kings 19:16b, 19-21
Psalms 16:1-2, 5
Galatians 5:1, 13-18
Luke 9:51-62

Monday, July 3

Ephesians 2:19-22
Psalms 117:1-2
John 20:24-29

Tuesday, July 4

Genesis 19:15-29
Psalms 26:2-3, 9-12
Matthew 8:23-27

Wednesday, July 5

Genesis 21:5, 8-20
Psalms 34:7-8, 10-13
Matthew 8:28-34

Thursday, July 6

Genesis 22:1-19
Psalms 115:1-6, 8-9
Matthew 9:1-8

Friday, July 7

Genesis 23:1-4, 19; 24:1-8,
62-67
Psalms 105:1-5
Matthew 9:9-13

Saturday, July 8

Genesis 27:1-5, 15-29
Psalms 135:1-6
Matthew 9:14-17

Fourteenth Sunday

In Ordinary Time
Sunday, July 9
Isaiah 66:10-14c
Psalms 66:1-7, 16, 20
Galatians 6:14-18
Luke 10:1-12, 17-20