

Transportation in Jesus Time

Matthew 17: 1-9

Exodus 24: 12-18

2 Peter 1: 16-21

“Transportation in Jesus Time” – the title of the sermon this morning – sounds like a grade school essay. How much is there to say about transportation in the time of Jesus? There was walking and riding on the back of an animal and various kinds of boats for moving on the water. No motors or cars or trains or planes. No bikes or mopeds or skateboards.

But notice – there is no apostrophe after Jesus’ name. “Jesus” is an adjective. I’m not talking about transportation in the time of Jesus. **I’m talking about the way Jesus transports us through God’s time.**

God is always on the move with humanity. God lets the people be taken into exile in Egypt and then under Moses leads them out of that exile into the promised land. The people live in the land, not exactly being obedient to the commandments God gave them through Moses, and they are taken into exile again, into Babylon. Eventually God calls a remnant of Israel out of Babylon. They return to Jerusalem to build another temple for the worship of God, worship that continues for hundreds of years. It must have seemed that God had finally settled down.

No. For one thing, as history proceeds, the Greeks and Romans expand their empires until Israel comes under Roman domination. The Jews practice their religion but it’s like being under house arrest, exiled in your own place. And for another thing, God is not pleased with their religious practice. They don’t want God to be in control of their lives; they want to be in charge. They seem to have lost sight of the essence of the commandments.

Recall our own reading of the Law earlier: *I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.*

Into this situation, God sends Jesus. Jesus Christ is the new covenant, God calling directly into human hearts to bring us out of the exile of sin and disobedience. Certainly, Jesus lived and taught publicly in a specific time and place. **But Jesus is God with us in all times and in all places. And Jesus is moving in each of us and through each life. Jesus, now, transports us through God's time.**

Sometimes we fly! Sometimes we absolutely soar! Love prevails in our lives. Our daily work has meaning. We find joy in the companionship of friends and family. We feel showered with blessings and sense the presence of a holy spirit. These are mountaintop times, a term that comes first from Moses' experience of coming into the presence of God on the mountain: *Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai...Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire...A mountaintop experience is filled with energy and mystery, beauty and power and insight.*

Peter, James and John also had a mountaintop experience. Jesus took them there. *... he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white... [and] suddenly bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"* The very voice of God. A mountaintop experience, filled with energy and mystery, beauty and power and insight.

Think back upon your own lives. Have you ever had such an experience? They usually don't last long, and often we don't understand what they are until later, when we have time to reflect. But indeed there are times when Jesus flies us to the mountaintop and that one brief shining moment can sustain us for a long time.

Peter is ready to stay on the mountaintop forever. He wants to build houses for Moses, Elijah and Jesus so they can live there exalted in glory (and presumably Peter, James and John would stay there too. Hey...).

But Jesus will not stay put. "*Get up and do not be afraid,*" he tells them. ... *when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.* And then they came down from the mountain.

A good thing, because sometimes – more times – we do not fly high, we plod along through life. Sometimes the road is rocky and the way is dark. We don't know where we're going and we don't even care. Sometimes life seems boring, just one overcast day after another. Those are the times in the valleys – the valley of the shadow of death, the valley of woe and travail, the valley of depression.

How many hymns and psalms and prayers are written from the valleys of despair!

- "Precious Lord, take my hand, Lead me on, help me stand; I am tired, I am weak, I am worn..."
- *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff - they comfort me.*
- The poem *Footprints*: a man is walking side by side with Jesus; there are two sets of footprints. But the going gets rough; the man complains; he sees only one set of footprints. Where were you then, Jesus? Jesus replies: that is when I carried you.

Think back on your own lives. Ever had such an experience? There are times when we are so tired, so down, so ready to give up. And then a card, a phone call, a visit, a word and you know that however it comes to you, through whatever person or experience, Jesus is walking with you, your heart is strangely warmed, and you know that you will find joy again.

Someone wrote, as a testimony in a church newsletter, that Jesus transports us through life and time on a bicycle. Let me share that story with you.

At first I saw God as my observer, my judge keeping track of the things I did wrong, so as to know whether I merited heaven or hell when I die. He was out there, sort of like a president; I recognized His picture when I saw it, but I really didn't know Him.

But later when I met Christ, it seemed as though life was rather like a bike ride, but it was a tandem bike, and I noticed that Christ was in the back helping me pedal.

I don't know when it was that He suggested we change places, but life has not been the same since.

When I had control, I knew the way. It was rather boring, but predictable...it was the shortest distance between two points. But when He took the lead, He knew delightful long cuts, up mountains and through rocky places at breakneck speeds. It was all I could do to hang on! Even though it looked like madness, He said, "Pedal!"

I worried and was anxious and asked, "Where are you taking me?" He laughed and didn't answer and then I started to trust.

I forgot my boring life and entered into the adventure, and when I'd say, "I'm scared," He'd lean back and touch my hand.

He took me to people with gifts that I needed, gifts of healing, acceptance and joy. They gave me their gifts to take on my journey, my Lord's and mine.

And we were off again. He said, "Give the gifts away; they're extra baggage, too much weight." So I did, to the people we met, and I found that in giving I received, and still our burden was light.

I did not trust Him, at first, in control of my life. I thought He'd wreck it; but He knows bike secrets, knows how to make it bend to take sharp

corners, jump to clear high rocks, fly to shorten scary passages. And I am learning to shut up and pedal in the strangest places, and I'm beginning to enjoy the view and the cool breeze on my face with my delightful, constant companion, Christ.

And when I'm sure I just can't do any more, He just smiles and says, "PEDAL."

It strikes me that this story represents the maturation of faith, the coming to trust God completely over all the geography of life, mountaintop or valley. And it also nearly parallels the history of God with humanity as represented by the people Israel.

In the end it is Jesus who transports us through God's time. Today we come to have communion with this same Christ who has promised to be with us always, even to the end of the world.

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