

Homily, July 1, 2007
13th Sunday in Ordinary Time
1 Kgs 19:16b, 19-21 / Ps 16 / Gal 5:1, 13-18 / Lk 9:51-62

It's summer, a time for people to be on the move: going on vacation, heading to the lake for the 4th, going to the zoo.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is on the move too. We've just heard the beginning of what is known as Luke's travel narrative. Jesus has begun his journey to Jerusalem.

While Luke's setting for this part of the Gospel is a journey, that's not his focus. What we will hear every Sunday for the rest of the summer is Jesus talking. As we go along on his journey we will hear him in conversation with his apostles, teaching his followers, and calling others to repentance and conversion.

We'll meet people along the way: Zacchaeus, the tax collector; Martha and Mary; the man born blind. Jesus will tell us our favorite parables: the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the Lost Sheep, the Rich Man and Lazarus. We'll hear his teachings on marriage and divorce, and receive instruction on prayer and on the way of discipleship. He will make us aware of the challenges we will face because of our faith.



But why did Luke say that Jesus “resolutely set out for Jerusalem?” It's because Jesus was well aware that once he arrived there he would face persecution and death ... although he knew as well that death would not be the end, not by any means.

Jesus set out on the journey resolutely, but not freely, even though I would like say that he did – it would let me preach about freedom right before the 4th of July.

Jesus was compelled to go to Jerusalem out of love for his Father, and out of love for the people he came to save, including you and me. Love does not allow us to act freely, it binds, tangles us up in relationships and obligations.

And that's the odd thing about today's Gospel. Jesus begins his journey with what seem like callous remarks to people who were simply trying to balance their family obligations with their desire to follow him.

Where is the love in that? Is that supposed to speak to us today?

And it doesn't help to know that in all of these encounters, Luke is making allusions to the great prophets Elijah and Elisha, so that his readers understand the prophetic nature of Jesus and his journey.

One way to work through tough passages in scripture, is to put yourself into the story, to elaborate on it with your imagination.

What happened to the man who wanted to bury his Father? Did he bury his father? Did he follow after Jesus?

I don't think he ever made it to Jerusalem. Here's what I imagine:



As he prepared his father for burial, the words of Jesus kept coming back to him:

“How can someone who is dead bury anybody?
I'm not dead am I?”

“Follow me he says', then he says 'go and preach the Gospel.'
That doesn't make sense either.”

The next day, while standing in his shop, lost in thought over that perplexing conversation, someone came in and stood before him.

It was Samuel, an old friend ... a former friend, actually. They'd had a great falling out and hadn't spoken for years, over what he couldn't quite remember. Not that there was anything strange in that.

He had a temper and was self-righteous, to put it mildly. It made it hard for him to keep friends for long. It's why he'd been so close to his father, for there was no one else in his life.

"I'm sorry Nathan," said his former friend in a quiet voice, "to hear about your father. He was a good man."

Nathan just stared at him. After a few moments, Samuel finally said, "Well, I'd better be on my way ... " and turned to go.

"No!" said Nathan abruptly, suddenly coming to life.

"No, don't go ... I mean, you've come a long way and it's getting late, let me at least give you something to eat and drink ..."



Something that was dead in Nathan came slowly back to life that day.

Although he never left his village, he did change the road he was on and began to follow the teachings of that prophet who had once seen into his heart and called him to a new life.

Did he ever preach the Gospel? I don't know. Maybe you can imagine that part on your own.



Life is a journey, not from place to place, but from our beginning to our end, a journey in time rather than geography.

There is no map, no well-marked trail. We can't ever back up and retrace our steps, we must face whatever we come upon: joy and pain, challenges and drudgery.

And everyone's journey is different. But we all have the same destination, just as Jesus did, we are all going to die ... of course.

But what comes at the end of this life's journey? Where does our path lead and through which gate will we exit?

God gives us the freedom to choose our own paths in life, but he also came and lived among us to open the gates of heaven and show us the way to get there. ... and if that weren't enough, he will, in a few minutes, give us food for the journey.

As with Nathan, he even invites us to change our road when it leads not to the light of heaven, but to darkness and death.

But like Nathan, we need to ponder over our lives, and consider what the prophet says to us today about the path we have chosen.

So maybe, in all your journeys and travels this summer, there is one more trip you need to make: go with Jesus to Jerusalem, and listen as he tells you the way.