

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

First Sunday in Lent - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church (Train Sunday)

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Psalm 91:1-2; 9-16

Romans 10:8b-13

Luke 4:1-13

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

¹Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." ⁴Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

⁵Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸Jesus answered him, "It is written,

'Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.'"

9Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10for it is written,

‘He will command his angels concerning you,
to protect you,’

11and

‘On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”

12Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” 13When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

The Beginning

Good Morning! Today is the first Sunday in Lent. So, for most of us, our Lenten journey begins today. In my sermon last week on Ash Wednesday, I gave some background about Lent but I thought it would be good to save a few facts for the sermon today.

The season of Lent developed as a response to what we call Holy Week. The final days of Jesus’ life was originally called the Pascha. The last supper, crucifixion, and resurrection were celebrated largely as one. But in the fourth century, those events were separated. And here’s the little detail I found interesting: this first started in Jerusalem.

Pilgrims and other travelers would literally journey from historical location to historical location to remember and listen to scripture about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.¹ The people would literally go from place to place, reenacting the passion, reading scripture together.

We even have notes from a Spanish woman named Egeria who wrote: *"The beginning of the Easter Week, or as they call it here, 'the Great Week'... all the people go before [the bishop] with psalms and antiphons, all the time repeating, 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.'"*² James F. White summarizes the rest of her notes saying that *"There were minor services on the next three days, except on Wednesday the presbyter read about Judas' plot to betray Jesus and 'the people groan and lament at the reading.' On Thursday, after everyone had received communion, all 'conduct the bishop to Gethsemane.' And on Friday, services were held at Golgotha where fragments of the wood of the cross were venerated by all the people. They processed past the cross and kissed it."*³

This literal journey became the culmination and focus of the Christian life, and Lent became the journey within the journey as we follow Jesus to Jerusalem over these next 40 days. It's why the texts today speak of a journey, and why the hymns have been selected in this way.

Which brings us to Train Sunday. As I was preparing this past week for this sermon I kept trying to think of ways to include a journey or train into my sermon. To be

¹White, James F. *Introduction to Christian Worship*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000. p. 55.

² Ibid, p. 55.

³ Ibid, pp. 55-56.

honest, I kept thinking of the Underground Railroad, and the early African American spirituals that were sung by slaves. I struggled with what to write, and then picked up *More Days for Praise: Festivals and Commemorations in Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. It talks about the many feast days for saints and other Christian leaders throughout time who have dedicated days for remembrance. I turned to today and discovered that March 10 is the commemoration of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth. Sometimes the Holy Spirit gives you a nudge, and sometimes it hits you over the head! Then, with Friday being International Women's Day, it was clear where this sermon needed to go.

If you want to talk about a journey towards the Promise Land you need not look any further than the fight women have had for equality and dignity. The United States of America doesn't formally recognize March 8th as International Women's Day, and even within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America female clergy are often considered second rate. Here in the Virginia Synod, female clergy are routinely paid not just less than their male counterparts, but less than guidelines! It's a journey that isn't over, and it's a journey that Harriet Tubman was all too familiar with.

Harriet Tubman was born a slave in Maryland in 1822. She led thirteen successful missions and helped over 300 slaves escape to freedom. She was incredibly resilient. During her slavery she was beaten so severely that she suffered seizures for the rest of her life. In 1861 she went even further underground and served as a spy for the Union army during the Civil War. She was a strong advocate for the women's suffrage movement and died on this day in 1918.⁴ Speaking of her call, she said the following:

⁴ Ramshaw, Gail. *More Days for Praise: Festivals and Commemorations in Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2016. pp. 55-56.

“Long ago when the Lord told me to go free my people I said, ‘No, Lord! I can’t go. Don’t ask me.’ But He came another time, and I said again, ‘Lord, go away. Get some better-educated person. Get a person with more culture than I have.’ But He came back a third time, and spoke to me just as he did to Moses. He said, ‘Harriet, I want you.’ And I knew that I must do what He bid me to do.”⁵

Sojourner Truth is by far the lesser known of the two. She was born in New York in 1797 and was married by 1815. In 1826 she escaped slavery and took her new name in 1843. By the 1850’s she was speaking as she traveled, fighting for women’s rights and speaking for abolition. She lived until 1883 when died in Battle Creek, Michigan. ⁶ We all seemed to learned about Harriet in elementary school, but Sojourner slips through the cracks, or at least in my education she did. When speaking about her name change she shared a powerful message:

“When I left the house of bondage I left everything behind. I wasn’t going to keep nothing of Egypt on me, an’ so I went to the Lord an’ asked him to give me a new name. And the Lord gave me Sojourner because I was to travel up and down the land showing the people their sins and bein’ a sign unto them. I told the Lord I wanted two names ‘cause everybody else had two, and the Lord gave me Truth, because I was to declare the truth to the people.”⁷

The church has routinely underestimated the role that women have played. Sojourner once said that: *“If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn*

⁵ Ibid, p. 56.

⁶Ramshaw, Gail. *More Days for Praise: Festivals and Commemorations in Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2016. pp. 56-57.

⁷ Ibid, p. 57.

*the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back , and get it right side up again!”*⁸ The early church thrived on the ministry of women. The stories of Martha and Mary come to mind, as well as the support that Lydia gave to Paul, allowing him to continue his own ministry. More recently, women have been working quietly behind the scenes to keep churches running like well-oiled machines.

Things continue to be a challenge. Now some men complain that women are demanding too much, or that there isn't even a problem. As a man, let me tell you, those men have had it so good for so long that they don't even know what equality looks like. God has been calling us to recognize the unique role that women offer for the Body of Christ. It's time we actually listened!

Sojourner Truth gave a famous speech titled *Ain't I a Woman?*, and it's here that I would like to end this sermon, but you should hear her words from someone other than me;

Pastor Tim left the pulpit and Martha Miller read the following speech.

“That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I could have sloughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man — when I could get it — and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have

⁸ <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/sojtruth-woman.asp>

*borne thirteen children, and seen them most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?"*⁹ Amen

⁹Blount, Brian K., et al. *True To Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007. p. 162.