

Holy Tuesday
April 11, 2017

The Pilgrim's Path

Last week, as I was lecturing to my ABAC class about Christianity in the Middle Ages, I gave them an overview of the Crusades of Christians, which consisted over a few hundred years of soldiers, nobility, ordinary people and even children, who set out with the encouragement of priests and popes, from the only homes they knew, on a spiritual adventure to travel thousands of miles, mostly on foot, to Jerusalem in the Holy Land. Though the knights and soldiers among them were under the directive to roust the infidels they would find at their destination, and some of this more bloodthirsty fervor led to brutal acts against undeserving Jews and others along the way, many pilgrims were inspired just to walk in the place where Jesus walked, taught, suffered and died, and then rose again from the dead. Thinking about these people who more than likely had little-to-nothing to carry with them, and no concept of what we call *transportation*, they went anyway, carrying their longing and their dread, trusting in the goodness of humanity to offer them food and shelter as needed, and in the mercy of God to preserve and protect them on their way, and then to bring them safely home again. There is something compellingly romantic about

the pilgrim's path, and there is also something vulnerable and dangerous about it, too.

I think of Holy Week each year as a kind of pilgrim's path, where we set out each year with both longing and dread, to open ourselves physically, emotionally and spiritually to the path that Jesus has set for us—the path of a life of self-sacrifice that he has shown us by walking it first. From the gospel of John for tonight, we heard Jesus offer to set a course for us into a territory where we are invited to be *all in*—wherever it leads. *Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.* We do not know exactly where we are going, or how we will get there, but we are drawn to commit to a journey that promises to crack open our hearts by following in story and sacrament the path to a life of dying and rising, with God at the center of all things. Our *longing* is to be close to the God of compassion who loves us so much that he would die for us. Our *dread* is that as we follow in the story of Holy Week we know that death is coming soon for Jesus; we understand this better than even his own disciples did, and we understand that he is doing this of his own accord. We know that our Holy Week pilgrimage will take us all the way to the foot of the cross on which our Lord was lifted up, and we struggle to imagine what this must

have been like for Jesus to die like a grain of wheat that falls to the earth to be buried so that much fruit could be born from it—for us. At the same time, we long for forgiveness for our share in the sins of the world that set Jesus on his journey of self-sacrifice, in order that we be brought out of darkness to become children of light.

And so we walk on, one day--one evening at a time, saying our prayers, carrying our longing and our dread, and placing one foot in front of the other because we know that beyond the dust and the sore feet, beyond the sunburn and the aching joints, beyond the fear of the unknown, beyond the fatigue of coming to church night after night, and beyond our listening in the word of God to the brutal and sorrowful story of the Passion of the Christ, there is redemption. We keep walking on this pilgrimage because we are called by its power and its mystery, and because we carry with us the hope for renewal and transformation and resurrection at our journey's end. May you be blessed in all ways on your own pilgrimage this week and always. AMEN