

Thomas R. Cook
St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota
9:00 and 11:15 a.m. Celebrations of the Holy Eucharist
The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 16, 2018

“All Roads to Heaven go Through Golgotha”

Scripture: Mark 8:27-38; 17 Pentecost B (Proper 19B)

[A vignette, spoken with a sort of “wise guy” tone of voice...]

So, uh, I hear you're lookin' for the Kingdom of Heaven? Yeh, sure, I know how to get there. What you want to do is... once you hit Bethlehem center, you'll want to take a left and head out by that little Inn with the Manger there on the edge of town. But don't try to spend the night there; they'll just tell you they're full. So, get off the freeway and hightail it out of town as fast as you can onto the little roads south and west until you hit Egypt. Yeh, it's a long way. And be careful getting there; the cops are not friendly. They work for that crazy King Herod guy.

Now once you have hung out in Egypt for a while head east and north again, but this time, you'll want to by-pass all that touristy area around the capitol and hit the main road straight up toward the big northern lake up there. You've heard of it before; the locals call it, uh, uh... Gennesaret! But you've probably heard it called the Sea of Galilee. Anyway, head up that way at least 65 miles or so north of Jerusalem,

and before you get to the lake, you'll want to find the village of Nazareth. Not a very fancy place, Nazareth. Sort of smells like sawdust and smoked fish.

Now from Nazareth, it gets a little tricky. You're gonna to want to take the rotary that puts you on the highway that goes north around the Lake. You're going to pass through all sorts of towns and villages up there. I would definitely recommend you pick up some traveling companions for this part of the trip. You're going to need the company. But eventually you'll merge with the big road that takes you back south to Jerusalem.

Now Jerusalem is a little strange; hard to get around there. Lots of narrow streets and busy highways, animals everywhere, soldiers and police. Anyway once you get to Jerusalem, you gotta watch your step. The locals aren't all that friendly, especially the religious types. But I highly recommend a visit to the Temple. Ah, lovely this time of year! You can buy most anything you want there nowadays. But watch out for the money-changers... very shady characters, very dishonest, very sad. But, um, now, where were we going? Oh yeah... the Kingdom of Heaven. Right.

Now this is the rough part. You need to go west off the Temple mountain and outside the big walls and wind your way out of the city proper. It's going to get a little spooky now, so be careful, because you have to go through Golgotha, where they kill

everybody on those big crosses, and you gotta pass all those bones and ugly graves and stuff. You'll probably lose your traveling companions here, but, look, don't stop there for long; just keep on moving until you come to a pretty decent little garden with a brand new tomb in it. Go ahead, go on in, take a look inside; it's all right; put your feet up for a while; maybe get a little rest. Then, when you're ready, come on out again, and, *viola!*... you've made it! You're there. The Kingdom of Heaven!

Well, yeh, I know you're still in that little garden, but once you've made it out of that tomb you're living in the Kingdom of Heaven no matter where you are, no matter where you go. Shortcuts? Naw, naw, there aren't any shortcuts. You got to travel the whole road. That's just the way it is. It's just like life: your gonna see some bad stuff along with the good. And there isn't any special scenic route either, I'll tell you. Actually, you're gonna see it all: the beautiful by-ways and fascinating cities and comfortable villages with their lovely people, and the desperately poor ghettos, mean and struggling folks, not to mention the hungry, the unemployed, the sick and lame, the beggars, and possessed people, even the graveyards.

You can't skip Golgotha if you want to get to the Kingdom of Heaven. Some people would like to think so, but not even Jesus couldn't do that. I heard Peter wanted him to! Yelled at him for just talking about it. And I also heard that Jesus set him to rights, even called him "Satan" for messing around with God's plan. Man, I

would have liked to have been there for that! Anyway, you wanna get to the Kingdom of Heaven?... that's how you get to the Kingdom of Heaven..., that is, if you're willing to go that way. *[End vignette...]*

It's quite a road isn't it, the road that Jesus had to walk. He tells his friends that he has to suffer and die, and that doesn't sound so great. So I came to this sermon with a question... "Is there [any] route to the Kingdom that bypasses Golgotha?"* Because, if I could avoid it, I would. Just like Peter. I don't want to suffer for my faith; I don't want to see that Jesus suffered. But the world is not well, and love isn't always welcome. Hey, try telling people in these times that meekness, love, faithfulness, maybe even suffering for the sake of others is the right way to live. That bearing such a burden is how we'll find our healing and peace. Peter couldn't take it then; I find it hard to take even now. Yet we Christians proclaim day by day that Jesus' road, his way of life, accomplished everything good that God set out to do to save us from the power of sin and death. No, sin is not removed from the world... yet. And death is most certainly a part; we are all touched by it somehow. But we walk the road; we've been to the tomb and have come back again, we live in the Kingdom of Heaven now. We are here to love, to offer dignity for all human beings,

* A question posed by Fred Craddock, et.al., in Preaching Through the Christian Year, Year B.

to welcome others, to practice mutual respect, humility, generosity, and faithfulness. You know, not everybody cares about those things, and they don't like it when other people do. Just ask Jesus. But I think that is his point to is this morning: Even if others don't get it, travel his road to get where you need to go; bear the difficulties along with the blessings; live not only for ourselves, but for the sake of others. And don't be afraid. The road will have its twists and turns and bumps and bruises. But it takes us where God intends us to go. And I'm grateful we go there together.

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.”