

Behold we go up to Jerusalem –

A sermon for Quinquagesima 2014

"Behold, we go up to Jerusalem,"

And Jesus took them aside telling them:

*"and all things that are written by the prophets
concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished.*

He must die and rise again.

"Behold, we go up to Jerusalem."

And with that;

they walked away from the tranquillity of Galilee

and towards the turmoil of the cross
planted in the filthy obscenity
of a city rubbish dump

And in the coming weeks

Jerusalem [*metaphorically speaking*]
is where our spiritual destination lies

We make the journey united by faith

.... up that exposed – steep - grinding path towards Jerusalem,

.... to share in his passion
.... to be healed and transformed
by that vision of the divine love.

That is what our coming journey through Lent is all about:

Move;

Throughout the whole of biblical history
the metaphor “.... ***to journey***”
emerges time and again.

and it’s an idea that fits well
with many of our own life experiences

.... we pass through ever changing scenes
.... not knowing quite where we are [*on the road*]
.... or which direction we’re heading in
.... we founder
.... we bumble and stumble on some vague course
.... our vision partial
.... our sights endlessly changing

.... as Paul said to his friends in Corinth

“we see through a glass darkly”

It was like that with Abraham;

at one stage he found himself
denied from seeing the picture in full;

"... a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him"

[Genesis 15:12]

all he could do at that point
was to put his trust in the divine compass
and walk by faith and not by sight

Shift;

And not knowing where all this was leading
the disciples gathered up their few possessions
and set their sights towards the Sun

....down into the Jordan valley
... across the River Jordan *[itself]*
and shortly afterwards they pass through
the outskirts of that ancient

"City of Palms" [Jericho]

.... and it's there where they
stumble across this beggar
[a blind beggar by the side of the road]

and even though this poor soul is without sight
he recognises in Jesus
a chance of a lifetime

"Lord [he said]

... Lord let me have my sight back again"

and without a moment's hesitation Jesus knows
this is someone in who's faith

is a means of his personal rescue and saving

.... and darkness tuned to light

.... the beggar can see

.... and all the while

the disciples continue to struggle on in their own darkness

Tom Wright once wrote that;

*“.... this is a pivotal moment [in Luke’s gospel]
where all the strands of Luke’s great story
come together”*

.... this journey is at once

.... puzzling and dark

.... and joyful and bright

On the one hand this is the place

where the forces of darkness are gathering

and will wreak their worst fury on Jesus himself

On the other hand

the powers of a new age are already at work

.... wherever Jesus is

people are not only welcomed into the kingdom

they are healed and given new life

which truly anticipates the total healing and joy

that are due to appear in God’s final new day

And how might both these strands fit together?

Well at the moment – they don't
.... the warnings fall on deaf puzzled – uncomprehending ears

Pause;

Perhaps the disciples are not alone

.... perhaps the bottom line is
we end up just as confused and bewildered
.... and we can do no more than did His friends

.... we turn our backs on the comfort
and familiar territory we occupy now

.... we set out with faith *[and confidence]*
to a new Jerusalem
in the assurance of his company

.... just as confused
but following his direction

and we might take comfort from Saint Augustine
[one of the early [and most important] Church Father's];

*"Faith is to believe what we do not see; [he wrote]
the reward of this faith is to see what we believe"*

To journey with Christ is to journey in faith:

".... Lord, that I may receive my sight."

Vision is the reward of faith

And all along the way to Jerusalem,
[the road to our spiritual destination]
we dip and dive
and weave and wander [... and wonder]

.... such is the mystery of our faith

Shift;

I once followed that same route
Jesus and His disciples took from Galilee to Jerusalem

.... as we departed the outskirts of Jericho
[which is in just inside the Palestinian occupied West Bank]
our Palestinian guide suggested
that there was a every chance
we'd be stopped by Israeli security

.... inevitably they'd want to know
where we'd been [and our intended destination]

.... on no account were we to admit to being in Jericho!!!

.... Israeli security forces [we were told]
are no respecters of British passports
or Anglican Bishops
or Airline timetables

.... sadly we weren't apprehended
and so the question
"would Bishop Martin own up to the truth?"
still remains a mystery to me

.... as I said; *“we see through a glass darkly”*

Our journey to Jerusalem
[the road to our spiritual destination]
our journey into light
our journey into understanding
the mystery of divine love
in the Passion of Christ

.... is not without its up's and downs
.... it's questions and mysteries
.... and its challenges

And the really big question for us *[this morning/evening]*
might be/should be this;

Can the lessons and the disciplines of Lent
really help us;

***“.... see more clearly –
.... follow more dearly”?***

Surely,
that seems far-fetched,
but then,
.... is that not the way of faith

God gives much in return for little
he gives all in return for nothing

All in return for nothing:

that is the ***divine charity*** which,
as St. Paul explains in today's Epistle,
is to be the very essence of our life as Christians.

Faith is an excellent thing, *[no doubt]*
and so is hope,
but they are only a beginning.

In heaven there is no faith;
in heaven there is no hope,
because heaven
is the knowledge and possession of that eternal good,
towards which
faith and hope can only aim.

In heaven there is only ***charity***,
the bond of love which
unites lover and beloved.

Without that love,
all our powers are worthless:
"sounding brass and tinkling cymbal," -
[or noisy nonsense.]

With the best gift of ***charity***,
we have eternal life

"For what shall separate us from the love of Christ?"
[Romans 8.35]

Therefore our journey of Lent

is not just a journey of faith and hope,
but a journey of love,

***a journey whereby we become
more firm in that bond of love
which unites us to God.***

It is a journey whereby we grow up in love.

"When I was a child, I spake as a child"

[says St. Paul]

We are like children who babble aimlessly.

Lent is a time to grow up and
put away childish things.

The disciplines of Lent are a serious matter,
being fundamentally a matter
of the nourishment of our childish souls.

Sometimes children imagine
that they could eat sweets *[and drink pop]*
exclusively forever.

"But when I became a man, I put away childish things."

Wouldn't we be better-off
with a little more time for prayer,
and a little less for empty chatter,
a little more time for the Word of God
and a little less for trivial words?

Habits are formed by disciplines;

and the habit of charity

[the habit of heaven]

is not formed by self-indulgence,

and the endless pursuit of worldly ends.

"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

[Matthew 6:21]

"There is one pearl of great price" and,

like the merchant in the parable,

we may have to sell quite a lot to buy it

Jesus bids us to new places –

.... new directions –

.... new life –

.... new treasures

".... Behold, we go up to Jerusalem." [He said]

.... let us go forward in His company [unified in faith]

.... let Him open our blinded eyes [and give us grace to ask]

.... let this be our Spiritual destiny

+ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen.

Amen.

And now as we stand to declare our faith in the words of the Creed,
may we gather up our thoughts – our worries and concerns and
offer them up to the Lord ...

Hymns;

***Open our Eyes Lord I want to see Jesus
Lead us Heavenly Father Lead us
love divine***