

“Hopelessly Lost, Hopefully Found”

Mark 10:32-39a

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They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

"We can," they answered.

Joel was backpacking alone in the Cascade Mountains of central Washington State. It was the middle of August and it was perfect hiking weather. Greening ferns laid a lush carpet. Rushing falls painted ribbons of white on the mountainsides. But the weather turned foggy one morning. Joel was due back at the park station in three days. He had to keep moving if he was going to make it before his food ran out. As the day wore on, it got even wetter. It began to be hard to find his bearings.

He knew it was coming, but he was still taken aback when he came across the avalanche field. He'd been warned about it down at the station. It was already legendary. They'd had so much snow here the previous winter, there had been a record number of avalanches. This particular field had been surveyed by an international avalanche expert. He said it was the biggest avalanche field he had ever seen in 30 years of work. It would be slow and slippery going over and under these huge fallen trees, this graveyard of lodge pole pine and Douglas fir.

But that wasn't the worst of it. The worst part was the field was so vast, the trail had been completely wiped out. There were cairns marking the trail, but in the grey drizzle Joel could only see a few yards ahead. As he slogged on, it began to dawn on him that he might be lost.

He decided it would be better to stop than to continue to try to look for the trail. He located a decent spot and settled in for a wet, chilly night. The cool nights had been welcome a few days earlier when he'd sweated out the long afternoons, but tonight he longed for a fire.

The dawn greeted him with more of the same---bone-chilling moisture and deep fog. There was no way he'd find the trail in these conditions. Another day passed and he continued hiking, though hopelessly lost by now. He wasn't anxious, though, because he was well equipped with the latest technology---both GPS and a satellite phone. His mom had insisted he take these along, since he was hiking alone. Even though he was, in a very real sense, lost, he didn't sense it.

Isn't it amazing how we can know exactly where we are but not have any idea where we are going? We can know exactly where we are and still be hopelessly lost. Joel had all the latest technology, but he didn't know the terrain. He didn't know the landscape. He'd lost the trail. He thought he knew where he was headed, but without the map, even with GPS, he had no idea how to get there.

So it is with James and John. We encounter them slogging along a trail, marching slowly uphill. They don't know it, but they are hopelessly lost. For the third time (this **is** the third time), Jesus tells all of them what it waiting for him in Jerusalem. Things haven't changed since the last time he told them. For the third time, it is not good. Jesus draws a pretty detailed map of what is going to happen.

Betrayal. Condemnation. Handed over. Mocked. Spit upon, flogged, killed. This roadmap of Jesus' suffering and death has plenty of detail.

Jesus tells them all of this, then something really weird happens. It is a very odd disconnect. We don't know the time frame. It may have been right away; it could have been hours later. The next thing we know, the next thing we hear, James and John approach Jesus and ask him to do something *for them*.

Remember, Jesus has just told them he is about to die.

Now the *faithful* thing would have been for them to say, "Whatever happens, Jesus, we will stay by you. We believe in you. We trust you. We know who you are."

They do not say this.

The *socially appropriate* thing would have been for them to say something like, “Jesus, what do you want us to do when we get to Jerusalem? Is there something we can do to help? We don’t want you to die!”

They might have been *confused*, but then they would’ve asked him, “Why does this have to happen, Jesus? We don’t understand.”

But this is not what they do.

Instead they say, “Hey Jesus, we know you just told us your days are numbered, but before you die, will you do us a favor?”

James and John certainly know where they are (with Jesus, walking to Jerusalem). They think they know where they want to be (with Jesus in glory). But they have no idea of how to get from groveling to glory. No idea.

They want to be with Jesus in glory, but along the way, they don’t expect an avalanche. They aren’t counting on fog. They don’t figure the weather would turn so lousy. They aren’t prepared to be hopelessly lost.

(An interesting side note: In the gospel of Luke, it’s actually their MOM who approaches Jesus with this line of questioning! It goes to show you Woody Allen did not invent that stereotype of pushy, interfering, Jewish mothers!)

Jesus asks the brothers J, “Do you think you can just punch in a few numbers, tell somebody your coordinates, and go home in glory? Do you honestly think this will work?”

“Why, uh, yeah. That’s what the GPS directions said. Are you saying this isn’t how it works?”

“Yes, that’s what I am saying. Can you drink the cup I am drinking?”

“Well, sure, drinking from a cup sounds like a celebration.”

“Drinking the cup I drink” was a Jewish expression that meant sharing someone’s fate. This particular cup had “Wrath” written all over it.

The cup Jesus drinks is bitter wine/gall/poison.

The cup Jesus drinks is loneliness, abandonment, humiliation.

The cup Jesus drinks is a cup *even Jesus* didn’t want to drink.

And the baptism? A flood, a shipwreck, a drowning.

The baptism that washes over Jesus kills him.

We think we know where we're headed, but we can't know how to get there. How often we ask God for a shortcut. We are pretty good at praying, "take this cup away from me." We want the good stuff without the pain. Sometimes we even grovel.

I haven't yet mentioned something crucial in Jesus' passion prediction. The part where Jesus mentions, "after three days [I] will rise". We don't notice this; perhaps neither did James and John. Each of Jesus' three passion predictions has this crucial phrase in it.

It is this part that makes **all the difference**.

Job cries out to God---in the midst of his own nearly unimaginable suffering: "if only I knew where to find him." Job was so distraught. He didn't have the map, you see. He looked for God in the north, and could not find him. He looked for God in the south, and God was not there. (From Job 23:1-17)

Jesus tells us where God meets us.

God finds us in our cup of suffering.

God finds us when we're drowning.

God finds us when we are deeply disturbed by a local news story of children who need foster parents; so deeply disturbed we do something.

God finds us when we let loose of things we used to think important: an old grudge, a bitter hurt.

God meets us when we are no longer owned by our possessions.

God meets us when our blindness falls away; when we see how we have been a part of making our own pain.

God meets us when we understand how suffering sometimes has within it the seed for something new and even good.

We're following the wrong roads when we rely on the maps most other folks are using. We are going the wrong way if we are on the crowded highway walking lockstep in the same direction as everyone else.

He is not to be found among the roads of recognition, along the trails of treasure. He is not there, in the byways of business as usual, or the detours of desire. He is not there, in places of comfort, in halls of power and self-congratulation.

His is not the road most travelled, but the often unsettling trek through unknown valleys, the venture into dense and seemingly impenetrable places.

Where do we find him? We find him in suffering **and** resurrection. In the new life that comes when we stop looking for shortcuts, when we give up devoting all our energy to the preservation of self. We follow him in the second chance that waits for us when we turn the corner away from self and into service. Then we know in a way we cannot know any other way---resurrection follows suffering. Glory follows giving; it fits just like a glove.

Jesus' suffering *and rising* is the map to follow. Jesus' death *and resurrection* was not just one single point on the map. His death and resurrection is the pattern for every one of us who believe, every one of us willing to put down Greatness, Position, Superiority--- the GPS of culture, to forget about technology that fails, to loosen our hold on the insurance of wealth, education, self-sufficiency.

It is the map to follow, certainly not the easy way, definitely not the smooth, paved road, but the rocky road upon which we renounce rest and arrive at resurrection. More trouble, not less, but a blessed trouble that transforms us beyond belief. A blessed trouble that tells us--- who were and ARE hopelessly lost---that tells us now and forever we are full-of-hope found by the One whom we have sought. By the One who has always and forever sought us. Full of hope found! No GPS needed. No GPS at all.