



Where is the Journey Leading Us?

Rev. Mark A. Medina
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Rollo May, the American psychologist once said:
It requires greater courage to preserve inner freedom, to move on in one's inward journey into new realms, than to stand defiantly for outer freedom. It is often easier to play the martyr, as it is to be rash in battle.

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Yes, we remember Jesus.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom

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We continue our walk with Jesus to the cross during this Lenten season. We spend this season reflecting on our relationship with him and what he is asking of us as we approach the cross. Holy Week will be filled with that opportunity for us to be with him as we walk with him through the events in Jerusalem.

This morning, I am inviting you to take a journey with me as we remember the one who is our center of life and faith, Jesus. We acknowledge the Messiah as the one who calls us to follow him and to serve him with our whole being as disciples of Christ. It is important for us to remember that he is the one who sets us free to love God, to love others and to love ourselves.

The question is: Can we experience freedom in our present lives by working to let go of the events and things that hold us hostage to the past? What is holding us back?

Sometimes the sins of the past haunt us and keep us locked in yesterday. Many of us live our lives on what was and what drives our existence today. Many of us recognize what we need to break free from the past and seek assistance with the help of counselors, psychologist, psychiatrists, or pastors. Of course the process of moving from the past to the present can be uncomfortable and full of difficult work because many of us just don't like change. We like the way it is in our lives. As people of faith, we remember Christ as the one who leads us out of the past and frees us to love and be loved.

Remember the words of Jesus as he shared with people what it meant to be a true disciple: ³⁴ **...“Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. ³⁶So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.** [John 8:34-36 (NRSV)] Yes, he frees us to live an abundant life. We remember Jesus.

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The journey we are on as people of faith requires us to center our lives on the savior. He is the one who frees us to live faithfully and honestly in a relationship with him. We must remember that we are not alone on this journey. The last sentence of the Great Commission, found in Matthew 28:20b, affirms this promise of Jesus, ²⁰ **...And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”** That’s a promise we can rely on every day and every night. A promise that Jesus will be with us. Yes, this is a promise we can all affirm on this journey of faith.

The leading of Christ in the world and in a person’s life is affirmed when he was in conversation with Nicodemus. The Lord pointed him to the most freeing biblical text about God’s love in the salvation of humanity.

John 3:16 is the one verse we all remember as the Gospel in Miniature. Together we say, ¹⁶ **“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.** With the power of this verse, the Lord reveals to us the central act of God to love this world and to love each one of us. Everyone one of us here today.

The affirmation of the loving God comes when Jesus said, ¹⁷ **“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.** The Lord brought salvation to the world by piercing the darkness of sin with his light of love and grace. Jesus said, ¹⁵ **“That whoever believes in him may have eternal life.** So the more we center our lives on Christ and his main reason for being here the more we believe him to be our Lord and Savior. We remember Jesus.

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As your Transitional Pastor, one of my developmental tasks is to help a congregation to come to terms with its history. The importance of the congregation knowing its history helps the people of the church to appreciate their and your heritage. At the same time, it is also an opportunity to become more aware of the joys and praises as well as the issues and concerns that need to be addressed in order to move freely into the future with a lot of hope. To truly move into the future with hope.

Friends, if we refuse to acknowledge the hurts of the past then the future just might become locked in denial. It has been my experience that if a congregation doesn’t resolve issues from the past then the people will be stuck with events in history and they will repeat themselves. And yes, they do.

For sure, avoidance and denial are no longer options. We can't change the past. We can't remain stuck in the past. This congregation can't afford to go through those traumatic events again. We can only look ahead to a new future with Christ continuing to lead us on our journey. He is leading us.

Indeed, this congregation is a gifted and talented body of believers. Every one of you has gifts to offer to help move this church forward. It is important to remember that you are on a journey of faith to further the kingdom of God and to make oneself a more faithful disciple of Christ. It's a constant movement forward. As you work through the difficult history, you can become stronger in your resolve and you know hope abounds. And love continues to grow.

Yes, there is freedom in looking to the future especially if we remember the words of Jesus when he said, **33But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.** [Matthew 6:33a (NRSV)] Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. So we move ahead in our journey of faith.

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I believe that the future holds wonderful blessings for this congregation. Let us center our attention on the Lord and what he is calling us to be in faith and in life.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians at Ephesus asking them to remember what God did in the giving of Jesus. Paul points to the one who leads the faithful to abandon the ways of the world and to find what's important in faith... **To you Christ has given life!** [2:1-3 JB Phillips] Abundant life.

Paul continues to remind the people of the love and salvation of God and how grace has freed them and us from the past. **“But even though we were dead in our sins, God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, gave us life together with Christ - it is, remember, by grace and not by achievement that you are saved...Thus he shows for all time the tremendous generosity of the grace and kindness he has expressed towards us in Christ Jesus....We are born afresh in Christ, and born to do those good deeds which God planned for us to do.** [Ephesians 2:1-10 j b Phillips translation of the New Testament]

Friends, the purpose of Jesus in our lives is to experience the grace, love and forgiveness that he offers to each of one us. And when we accept these blessings, we make the commitment to be Christ-like throughout life. To follow Jesus and to be like him in the world. We become free from the past and enjoy life with the Savior.

Paul teaches Christians to maintain their attention on Christ and to view others from a Christian perspective. **17So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!** [2 Corinthians 5:16-17 (NRSV)] Yes, the old has passed away and we look forward to the newness of life and of faith.

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My dear sisters and brother, Jesus is the one who frees us from the past and offers grace and salvation at any time in our journey. We must never lose sight of the fact that it is he who is the only one who gives freedom and offers us grace. Remember when Jesus was on the cross hanging between two thieves. One of the thieves said to him, ⁴²“**Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.**” Even at that last moment someone was saved. The Savior replied ⁴³...“**Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.**” [Luke 23:42 - 43(NRSV)] And that is also a promise for all of us who continue to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Yes, Jesus forgives our sins from the past so we can live with him in paradise. He leads us freely into the future with a sense of hope and a sense of grace. For he is God’s Son and our Savior.

Let us pray: Dear God, we come to you seeking a life centered on your Son Jesus. His purpose in coming to us is to show your goodness and love. May our lives be living examples of your grace. We know there are many distractions in our lives but ask that you keep us ever mindful of your presence. Guide us now, O God, as we seek your kingdom with hearts, minds and souls centered on you. We ask this in the name of the One who is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.



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Supporting Scriptures:

John 3:14-21 (NRSV)

¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the

judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

Ephesians 2:1-10 J. B. Phillips translation of the New Testament

To you, who were spiritually dead all the time that you drifted along on the stream of this world's ideas of living, and obeyed its unseen ruler (who is still operating in those who do not respond to the truth of God), to you Christ has given life! We all lived like that in the past, and followed the impulses and imaginations of our evil nature, being in fact under the wrath of God by nature, like everyone else.

But even though we were dead in our sins God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, gave us life together with Christ - it is, remember, by grace and not by achievement that you are saved - and has lifted us right out of the old life to take our place with him in Christ in the Heavens. Thus he shows for all time the tremendous generosity of the grace and kindness he has expressed towards us in Christ Jesus. It was nothing you could or did achieve - it was God's gift to you. No one can pride himself upon earning the love of God. The fact is that what we are we owe to the hand of God upon us. We are born afresh in Christ, and born to do those good deeds which God planned for us to do.