

Pre-show: how do you pack for a trip?

Welcome

I don't know that I've yet to arrive at a travel destination with everything I need. It's pretty much gotten to the point where I research the closest Walgreens or CVS before I leave so I know where to get some toothpaste, shampoo or a bar of soap that I inevitably forgot at the AirBnB where I stayed.

I've developed something of a packing routine - usually the night before a trip, I spend thirty minutes or so packing my suitcase with all the clothes I'm going to need. Socks and underwear, then pants, then shirts. Next are accessories: Do I need shoes beyond the ones I'm wearing? Belts? Hoodie or coat?

Next is my backpack - laptop, chargers, books and magazines.

Last, I go for the toiletries (and these are the things I always forget). I pack as much as I can, but most of it stays out because I need it tomorrow morning before we leave! (That's why I forget stuff - packing before coffee is a losing game.)

What are your trip-prep rituals?

One more for us - and this one is very weird. I don't remember why we started it, but I think before we were even married, we decided our "beginning the road trip song" was "La Grange" by Z. Z. Top. Why? Couldn't tell you. But as soon as we hit the road, we start the song and it's time to go.

Trip rituals help us get ready to go somewhere. They cue us in to the idea that it's time for a change. And today, at the end of Epiphany, we're setting out on a journey with Jesus. We're embarking on the journey of Lent, where we follow Jesus to the cross. So today, we're spending some time asking if we're ready to go. So... let's go!

Message

Today is the end of Epiphany, a season when we ask what it means that Jesus is for the whole world. We are Jesus' church, but Jesus isn't just for us. He's for the whole world. So what's our role in Jesus' mission?

This year, our series was called Spark! We explored the ways Jesus ignites our calling. What does it take to be the Church Jesus calls us to be?

We found those answers in the prophets and how Jesus' own life echoed their teachings. From the courage and vulnerability of Isaiah's servant to calls to find God among the most vulnerable, we've seen that God calls us to an engaged, vibrant faith that has real-world consequences.

Today is Transfiguration Sunday - it's sort of a hinge, a pivot point between Epiphany and Lent. We're moving from celebrating God with us to following what God does - giving Godself up to death for us.

Today is going to be a sort of extended invitation to Lent. So it's appropriate we begin with God's invitation to the people.

Turn with us to [Exodus 24](#).

This passage is set at the foot of Mt. Sinai. God has liberated Israel from Egypt and, under Moses' guidance, led them to this mountain. Mere days ago, God's presence consumed the top of the mountain, and God spoke the famous 10 commandments from the mountain, entering into a formal covenant with Israel.

It's not far off to imagine that moment as a wedding ceremony, where the 10 Commandments serve as sort of wedding vows.

Now, Moses is about to receive the whole of the Torah, God's plan for how Israel is to live in the world. God's description of what God's people will look like. That picture looks largely like a set of laws - God is describing the political reality of God's people.

As we read through this passage, I want to point out how much this feels like the religion most of us think of: God on the mountain top, inviting us to climb higher, and only a very few of us are spiritual enough to get there - most just stay on the ground.

As we read this passage, I want to invite you to consider who in the story you'd assume yourself to be:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain. Stay there, and I will give you the tablets of stone on which I have inscribed the instructions and commands so you can teach

the people.” So Moses and his assistant Joshua set out, and Moses climbed up the mountain of God.

Moses told the elders, “Stay here and wait for us until we come back. Aaron and Hur are here with you. If anyone has a dispute while I am gone, consult with them.”

Then Moses climbed up the mountain, and the cloud covered it. And the glory of the Lord settled down on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days. On the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from inside the cloud. To the Israelites at the foot of the mountain, the glory of the Lord appeared at the summit like a consuming fire. Then Moses disappeared into the cloud as he climbed higher up the mountain. He remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights.
-- Exodus 24:12–18 (NLT)

God invites Moses up the mountain. So Moses, Joshua and the Elders go partway up the mountain. Then Moses and Joshua go a bit further, and then Moses goes the rest of the way by himself.

In locating ourselves in a story like this, I think a lot of folks identify me with Moses... the chief spiritual guy who goes up the mountain to talk to God. Some of us might feel like Joshua - maybe Nathan or the preaching team. People almost - but not quite! - as spiritual as the main guy.

Then there's the elders - maybe our leadership team or key volunteers. And then what about everyone else? On the ground, far from the top of the mountain, removed from God's holiness by position and proximity.

But Jesus' transfiguration reverses this... it's a story that intentionally mirrors this one - Jesus and his closest followers head up the mountain. At the top, they have a powerful spiritual experience, but no one understands it. And then, Jesus just... leaves (after way fewer than 40 days).

Let's read:

Six days later Jesus took Peter and the two brothers, James and John, and led them up a high mountain to be alone. As the men watched, Jesus' appearance was transformed so that his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light. Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking with Jesus.

Peter exclaimed, “Lord, it's wonderful for us to be here! If you want, I'll make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

But even as he spoke, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy. Listen to him.” The disciples were terrified and fell face down on the ground.

Then Jesus came over and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” And when they looked up, Moses and Elijah were gone, and they saw only Jesus.

As they went back down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.” -- Matthew 17:1–9 (NLT)

We could talk about so much in this story, but in light of the fact that we’re approaching Lent, I want to point out the simple fact that it doesn’t matter how far up the mountain you get... you can still miss what Jesus is up to (Peter didn’t have a clue).

What we see happening here is God preparing Jesus for the final leg of his mission. This is a beautiful, powerful experience, but it’s not a place Jesus is meant to stay. Rather, God sends him back down the mountain, and from this point forward, he’s marching straight for Jerusalem (and his crucifixion).

So too with Israel - God never intended them to stay at Mt. Sinai. They were *always* meant to go to the whole world.

So here’s the invitation friends: *not* ‘Do you have the faith to climb the mountain?’

Because in Jesus, God leaves the mountain and comes to us. The question before us is, “Do you have the faith to pick up your cross and follow Jesus?”

SONG

Lent begins on Wednesday. It’s a season of confession and repentance. Really, Lent is about preparing ourselves to follow Jesus to the cross.

And these two stories illustrate the danger at the heart of religion - a danger we’ve been exploring throughout this series.

We began this series looking at the character of the Servant, a figure created to illustrate what God’s ideal follower looks like. And we saw again and again that God’s ideal follower is vulnerable and honest about their limitations. They really don’t consider themselves to amount to much - and they’re not wrong, actually. Because it’s not about what they can accomplish under their own strength; it’s about what God can accomplish through them.

But it was that next bit - where we looked at how often God’s people reduced faith to religious practices while ignoring the vulnerable around them that really hits.

Because you know what happens next in the story of Moses and Israel. Moses went up the mountain to get stone tablets.

And those stone tablets eventually become idols. The Torah, the way that God gave to Israel started out as wedding vows. They represented the love and commitment God and the people had for each other. They embodied the liberating they'd experienced from Egypt. With the Torah, they weren't just a rag-tag group of formerly enslaved people on the run. They were a nation, a people, unified by their love for their liberating God.

But over the centuries, those vows became laws. They became meaningless words the people could give lip service to while ignoring their meaning.

It got so bad that later prophets imagined a *new* covenant, one written on flesh rather than on stone.

Can you imagine that - something that was once liberating ended up being constrictive?

And yet we see that with Jesus, don't we? His message of liberation and love has been co-opted by the powerful. The movement founded by the man who ate with those rejected by the powerful has become a weapon to harm people of color, people whose sexuality doesn't fit into archaic binaries, people who have been excluded and crushed by a system of wealth acquisition that creates billionaires on the backs of millions.

That's precisely why Lent is such an important season. The task of recovering our faith is a never-ending journey. Today's liberating good news is always in danger of becoming tomorrow's tool of oppression.

[Lent Series Slide] Lent series and fast preview

We need to return to Jesus again and again. To pick up our crosses over and over. To follow him day after day.

Communion + Examen

Will we follow Jesus to this table?

How has God been at work in my life this year so far?

Where have I resisted God's invitation to transformation in this year so far?

Where might I be tempted to resist God's work in my life in these next weeks?

How can I make myself ready to say Yes to God in these next weeks?

Assignment + Blessing

Join us Ash Wednesday!