

Journey Inward – Journey Outward

Isaiah 55:6-13

Mark 1:16-20 & 3:13-14

Bible Mission USA

Sermon Archive

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*“Jesus appointed twelve...to be with him,
and to be sent out to proclaim the message”*

(Mark 3:14)

People of “*the Way*.” This was probably the earliest name for Jesus’ followers. And why not? Jesus said, “*I am the way*.”

In Greek the word “*way*” means literally a *path* or a *road*. God’s people follow Christ’s path. This is why Christians often refer to faith as a journey. But our faith is not a simple journey from point A to point Z.

The Christian Faith is a dual journey. It’s a *Journey Inward* and a *Journey Outward*.^{*} This easily remembered model describes what believers and churches need to be about.

^{*} I am indebted to Elizabeth O’Conner for the theme of this sermon. One of her many books about the vital ministries of the Church of the Savior in Washington, DC bears the title *Journey Inward – Journey Outward*.

When faith is healthy and strong there is always a *Journey Inward*, and there is always a *Journey Outward*.

This is an early learning for me. When I was in my late teens I wrote my grandfather about my sense of call to ministry. He had been a missionary and, at the time, was an active pastor.

Grandpa’s reply unpacked the very New Testament passage we have just read. Look again at the text for this sermon.

*“Jesus appointed twelve...
to be with him, and
to be sent out
to proclaim the message”*

For openers ask yourself: ‘What was the initial thing Jesus called his disciples to do?’

Many jump immediately to that proclamation challenge. But I want you to see that Jesus called his disciples first of all “*to be with him*”!

My grandfather made a large point of this, writing, “Paul, you will never have anything to preach to anybody until and unless you first spend time ‘*with Jesus*’.”

Journey Inward

Spending time with Jesus is the Christian’s *Journey Inward*. We call this journey ‘discipleship,’ which means developing a personal and growing relationship with Jesus. ‘Job One’ for the Christian is knowing Jesus Christ.

Christians do not believe Jesus is a long-ago and far-away character. He is alive! We can “*be with Him*” personally here and now! If Christianity does not begin with a personal relationship with Jesus, it does not begin.

Relationships are nourished by staying in touch. Fellows, you’ve heard me say this before. Wives are usually smarter about relationships than we. No husband ever had more to learn in this department than I.

I tended to be the ‘strong silent type.’ Early along in our marriage,

Jan helped me understand the error of my ways. “Honey,” she once said, “you can’t have a relationship with someone you’re not talking to!”

Are you on speaking terms with Jesus? What are some of the spiritual disciplines you can practice that will help to strengthen your relationship with Christ?

Start with the obvious – the Bible. We call the Bible God’s *Word*. In other words, God is not silent! By reading the Bible, you can still gather on the front row and listen to Jesus. You can actually hear Jesus speak.

More than that you can speak as well as listen to your Lord. We call this prayer. Sometimes – and this is a true confession! – I forget to pray. I’m likely to be the only person here who does this. My problem is I get preoccupied with deadlines, schedules and demands.

Sometimes, purely as an afterthought, it dawns on me ‘Hold on, Paul, I haven’t even prayed about this yet.’ I am so pleased Christ Church has committed itself to intentional Bible Studies and personal ministries of prayer.

To be sure, Paul urged us to “*pray without ceasing*” (1 Thess. 5:17). He meant train your spirit to live in

moment by moment relationship with God's Spirit. We need to honor that, while not forgetting Jesus' word about prayer. He said:

*“when you pray
go into your room
and shut the door
and pray to your Father
who is in secret...”*

(Matthew 6:6)

The “*room*” Jesus refers to was a small storeroom in the tiny houses of his day. Jesus is urging us to find a place where we can be alone with God. Do you make time for prayer in your daily schedule? Do you make space in your mind to be quiet before the Lord?

Are you familiar with the movie *Shadowlands*? It's the touching story of C. S. Lewis and his wife Joy. Anthony Hopkins plays the part of Lewis whose affectionate name was ‘Jack.’ One of the film's tender scenes shows Jack and his new wife, Joy in his bedroom on their wedding night.

Lewis – a previously confirmed bachelor! – is clearly ill-at-ease. He admits to his new wife, “I'm not altogether sure about the procedure here.” Joy rescues the awkward moment.

“Jack,” she asks quietly, “what do you do to get ready for bed?”

Looking relieved Lewis says, “Well, I come into my bedroom, draw the drapes, brush my teeth, wash, put on my pajamas and pull back the bed covers. Then I kneel down and say my prayers.”

“You mean,” Joy responds thoughtfully, “just like a little boy?”

“Yes, I suppose,” says C. S. Lewis, “just like a little boy.”

The greatest defender of Christian faith in the twentieth-century felt it important to kneel down beside his bed at night and say his prayers. How do we lesser saints give ourselves a pass saying, “We surely don't need to be bothered with that sort of thing anymore, do we?”

This morning I urge you to ‘bother with that sort of thing.’ Make time to read your Bible and pray. These are essential disciplines in your *Journey Inward* “*with Jesus.*”

Remember, ‘You can't build a relationship with Someone you're not listening to and talking with.’

Journey Outward

Then our text shifts to a *Journey Outward*. It is true, if Christianity does not begin with individual believers – it does not begin. But it is likewise true that if

Christianity ends with individual believers – it ends! Listen once again,

*“Jesus appointed twelve
to be with him,
and to be sent out
to proclaim the message”*

Being “*sent out to proclaim the message*” is the *Journey Outward*. This has little to do with preaching sermons. It means ‘following Jesus’ and sharing with others what you’ve learned. Bearing witness to Jesus includes what you *do* and what you *say*.

Christ Church is deeply committed to outreach Missions. Through your support and their work, you are meeting the desperate needs of children, youth, and adults struggling in our area and in our troubled era.

Some Christians feel more comfortable serving the physical needs of others, rather than speaking spiritually with others about Jesus. So, let me focus for a moment on ‘verbal witness bearing.’

Not so long ago, I was flying to a speaking engagement and arrived at the gate area a bit early. No one was there except one fellow propped against the back wall. He was pecking away on what looked to be one of those convenient, ultra-thin laptops.

I’d been curious about these new models. So I moseyed over and plopped down across from him. “Looks like a great little light-weight tablet,” I observed quietly.

He gave me an affirmative monosyllabic grunt. Maybe you’ve noticed – travelers in gate areas aren’t very interested in conversing with strangers.

So I went on talking. “All I’ve got is one of the old heavy units. But lately I’ve been wondering if one of those new slender laptops, that could double as a tablet, might fit my needs a little better.”

He saw I was serious about the issue – and I was! So he invited me over to have a look.

Condescendingly he began by pointing out the keyboard, the mouse and curser, and the icons on the screen. Then he began punching keys furiously, racing through what his computer could do. Computer aficionados seem bent on proving they really know how to use their instrument.

I wasn’t altogether sure what he was showing me, but I was enthusiastically rooting him on!

At the end of his hasty tutorial he patted the little computer on his knee and said, “You know, this little puppy has changed my life.”

“Isn’t that amazing!” I said energetically, “when a little gizmo like that can change a fellow’s life. In my case, my life was changed by Jesus Christ.”

The poor guy didn’t know what hit him. He was talking computers, and suddenly Jesus shows up! At the mention of ‘His name’ he may have wanted to get away, but he was plugged in back there!

I wasn’t trying to be pushy or offensive. Look, he opened the door by telling me *how his life was changed*. I have a right to respond by telling him *how my life was changed*.

We talked about Jesus. This story does *not* end with us kneeling down in the gate area and having a prayer of commitment. That did not happen. Instead, the flight attendant called us to board. He went to his seat, I went to mine.

Did anything come of our conversation? Did it make any difference?

I have no idea. And I hope you’ll understand when I say, that doesn’t concern me very much. Christ did not send me to keep score. He sent me to seed Jesus into other’s thoughts. Only God can bring life to a seed that’s been planted. And God does!

This past Thursday afternoon, our daughter, Faith, saw a homeless man sitting on a curb drinking a Coke.

She told me, “The Lord whispered to my spirit, ‘Give him \$5.00 and slip it into that leather covered Bible in your car.’ You know, Dad, I’ve learned to act on what God’s Spirit tells me to do.”

The homeless fellow was grateful for the money – but he never moved. She saw him sitting there in the hot sun, seemingly mesmerized by the Word.

There are more doors that swing open inviting our witness than most of us ever recognize or claim.

Our Christian lives are supposed to be balanced between a *Journey Inward*, getting to know Jesus, and a *Journey Outward*, making Jesus known.

Pulling Together

Maybe at this point, a symbol would help us pull things together.

The journey of faith is like rowing a boat. One oar is named ‘*Journey Inward*,’ the other ‘*Journey Outward*.’ Both oars need to be pulled together if the boat is to make any progress.

Some take hold of the oar called *Journey Inward* and paddle hard. For them, the only thing that really matters is how they are personally getting on with Jesus.

Others take hold of the oar called *Journey Outward* and pull furiously. They have little time for prayer or worship so focused are they on doing good work for Jesus.

In both cases, the boat is doomed to go around in circles. This helps to explain why some believers are dizzy and unbalanced, and some churches are stuck and going nowhere.

The life of a believer and of a church is about *Journeying* both *Inward* and *Outward*! Sometimes, to actually get anywhere, we need to pull a bit harder on our weaker oar, the one we've most neglected.

Many have been faithfully slogging along on some demanding *Journey Outward*. Perhaps you need to hear your Lord's gracious invitation to come away for a while and "*be with him.*"

Others of you have been enjoying a relaxed and comfortable *Journey Inward* with Jesus. Perhaps you need to hear your Lord's commission to be "*sent out*" to do his work and to speak your faith.

Walk "*with Jesus*" on the *Journey Inward*. Let his voice speak to you in Scripture and Prayer. Then obey Jesus' call to *Journey Outward* letting your voice bear faithful witness to His love and grace.

These two *Journeys* are at the heart of Jesus' call: "*Follow Me.*"



Washington Gladden was a Congregationalist minister back in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He lived that balanced Christian life.

As a Pastor and a believer, he was personally committed to applying Christian principles to the newly emerging labor/management issues of his day.

As a Pastor and believer he was spiritually sensitive to the need for the personal walk with Jesus that provides the real foundation for all Christian service. He wrote:

*O Master let me walk with Thee
in lowly paths of service free.*

This hymn, by which Gladden is best remembered, combines these two directions – the *Journey Inward* and the *Journey Outward*. Listen for these dual *Journeys* as together we sing:

"*O Master Let me Walk with Thee*"