

## On the Move

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Brian and Evie and I have been re-reading the Chronicles of Narnia series by C.S. Lewis. I hope you've read it, but if not, it is a good series for all ages beginning with the wonderful story *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. If you're not familiar, the basic outline is that it is a fantasy story about four children who stumble through a wardrobe into a land called Narnia. When they get there they find that Narnia is ruled by a witch, an evil witch, who rules by fear and has made the whole place stay as winter always. There are no humans in Narnia, but there are plenty of talking animals who the children meet. Many Narnians are doing their best to subvert the witch and the animals tell the children about Aslan, a mighty lion who is the true ruler of Narnia, but Aslan comes and goes from Narnia, as he rules in other places too. The various talking animals tell the children multiple times that Aslan is "on the move." He is coming back to Narnia and once he arrives all things will be put right.

As I read about Aslan being "on the move" it made me think of our scripture today. In the reading, we hear that Jesus has resolutely set his face towards Jerusalem. Jesus is "on the move" to Jerusalem. Jesus knows he doesn't have a lot of time left – there isn't going to be a lot more time for teaching or healing. He knows that as he heads to Jerusalem, the people with him won't have the luxury of hearing the Sermon on the Mount, or seeing the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. The people with him now need to be ready to follow – not in a few days or weeks, but right then. I mean, honestly, he knows that even the disciples who have been with him for the whole journey won't deal well with what is coming. Even those who have seen all the miracles and heard all the teachings will still betray and abandon him, despite their promises not to do just that. To follow Jesus at this point, you had to be ready to go. The time was near and the moments left were precious and few. Jesus is preparing to complete his mission to embody fully the kingdom of God - a kingdom of peace and love.

Still, the disciples don't understand what is happening. They are still set on their own agendas. They still think Jesus is getting ready to start a war and claim the throne. Their misunderstanding is on full display when, as Rev. Judith Watt says, "the disciples went ahead of him and found that the people in the Samaritan village would not welcome Jesus, they came back to Jesus and asked him, "Do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" They wanted to incinerate Samaria, seek retribution. Jesus would have none of it. He rebuked them. He had his face set toward something else.

...Instead of drawing a line and dismissing these Samaritans, bringing down fire on them, Jesus led his disciples in a different direction. Keep going. Don't get distracted by your tendency to even the score or incinerate people who are different or who disagree. Keep your faces set toward the mission—love—even when it doesn't make sense." Jesus rebukes revenge and retribution. He is very clear about it. Jesus was set on Jerusalem because he was set on showing God's sacrificial love, God's kingdom of peace, God's desire to include all people. While the disciples are still concerning themselves with who is "in" and who is "out." This is the first thing about being "on the move" - you have to prioritize, you have to stay focused on the mission. And "the call, (the mission) Jesus reminds them, is to bring life, not death — even to those who reject and insult us. The call is to practice forgiveness and forbearance, never retribution and revenge. The call is to face each other gently and with great patience, because even the people who make our blood boil are precious to God."

Jesus is resolutely set on love and on peace. Jesus will not be moved from that path. And that is the path he invites us to join him on. That's what it will look like to follow Jesus. Theologian David Lose describes this path as one which is ever growing: "To eschew violence, to embrace suffering for the sake of another, to refuse comfort, privilege, status for the sake of fidelity to God's vision and mission."

That's a difficult call to follow and in these last days, Jesus is done trying, if he ever did try, to sugarcoat it. He was honest about the challenges of following, so clear most people would turn him down. But if you hear the mission - if you understand the challenges of being a disciple - and you are still interested, Jesus knows there are plenty of things that still might get in your way. As Jesus continues on his way to Jerusalem, he encounters three possible disciples, people who want to follow, but who show us just what kinds of things can stand in our way, even when we have accepted the challenge of the mission.

To the first would-be disciple Jesus says, "foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head." In other words, following Jesus is not about setting up camp somewhere and staying put. It's not about getting comfortable. Being a disciple of Jesus means being ready to be on the move; to be called somewhere, or to something, new. And, I don't know about you, but I am pretty attached to my routines and comforts.

As our group went on the Chicago Mission Trip this last weekend, just in those few days I was reminded of just how hard it is to uproot ourselves - to be out of our comfortable places and routines; to need to eat different foods; sleep in a new place; deal with new people and new situations. I definitely had moments thinking about how I just don't know that I'm cut out for communal sleeping or bunk beds anymore. I enjoyed the trip, but I was quite happy to return to my house, my bed, my groceries, my routines.

Knowing that about myself makes me wonder if I am flexible enough, nimble enough or ready to follow Jesus. Am I open to hearing God's voice if it is telling me to move, to change, to do something new or different or out of my comfort zone? I know I am not alone in being a bit (or sometimes a lot) resistant to change and that can be a problem when we are supposed to be following a leader who is always on the move. Jesus wants this would-be disciple to understand that following will mean regularly stepping out of our comfort zone. Being a disciple will mean regularly doing "a reordering of our priorities (professional, financial, and geographical), and that will feel risky and destabilizing. (It might mean:) a surrender of our most prized possessions and preferences. A willingness to depend on the goodwill and generosity of others. An identity that isn't defined by the stuff we own, the clothes we wear, the degrees we earn, the neighborhood we live in, the company we keep, the awards we accumulate, or the cars we drive" but about who Jesus is calling us to be.

The second would-be disciple tells Jesus that he wants to follow him, but first he has to go and bury his father. It's a pretty good excuse to us today, but in Jesus' time, burying your parents was a sacred duty. It was one way you followed the commandment to honor your father and mother. It was a valid reason if there ever was one. But Jesus says "let the dead bury their own dead, but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Jesus comes off pretty callous there, but again, the time was now or never if this disciple wanted to be a part of what Jesus was doing.

For us, today, though, I think this is a reminder for us to not get so tied up in doctrine, traditions and rules that we miss what is really important about following Jesus. Tradition is good and important, but sometimes, it keeps us from being open to see a new way God is calling us to go. Sometimes, doctrine, traditions and rules need to be changed because God reveals to us how they are adding to the oppression and injustice in the world.

For example, it is a tradition of many churches to preach to the LGBTQ community that they are sinful and wrong. It is a tradition of many churches to tell women to keep silent. It is the tradition of most churches to really only worship with people of their own race, ethnicity, or economic situation. It is the tradition of some churches to say those who believe differently are less loved by God. In the Presbyterian Church, we have heard God calling us to break free of those traditions and doctrine. I'm sure there are other traditions and doctrines we will let go of in the years ahead. Jesus is on the move and we need to be prepared to let anything go, even things we have thought were central, if they are keeping us from being able to follow.

The third would-be disciple says he will follow Jesus, but he wants to go back and say goodbye to his family first. Here again, Jesus comes off rather callous as he responds, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." And again, if this man wanted to follow, it had to be now. Jesus was on the move. He wasn't waiting for folks to get their affairs in order.

But, to us, there is a helpful reminder that we can't follow Jesus if we are always looking back. Following Jesus means you have been given a new life, a new opportunity in the world. Our pasts have certainly shaped us, but we can't live there. However, many of us get stuck in our past. We may be focused on nostalgia or regret or grievances. We may be fixated on how things used to be better - when we were younger or healthier or happier. We may be caught up in our past pain and suffering, playing it over and over again in our minds.. We might be focused on people who have betrayed or rejected us, reliving what they said or did. We might spend too much time going over and over the things we feel guilty about or things we wish we could change. To all of that, Jesus says – come with me on a new journey instead – a journey of forgiveness and healing and redemption. Come be a part of bringing about God's peace and justice. If we spend too much time on all the "would have's", "should have's", "could have's", we can't be on the move with Jesus. Being on the move with Jesus means looking forward, turning our faces resolutely towards the future and setting our minds on how we can be a part of bringing the kingdom of God to earth.

I'm sure I'm not alone in being able to sometimes recognize myself in all three of these would-be disciples: set in my routines and comforts, holding onto traditions that no longer serve me well, spending too much time looking back instead of forward. But there is good news for us would-be disciples. Jesus is going to be on the move, no matter what we do. Jesus is going to do a new thing, no matter what we do. Jesus is going to embody sacrificial love and a kingdom of peace and a welcome of all, no matter what we do. There is no question that Jesus is on the move. The only question is whether we will be moving with him.

The promise Jesus made though, is that on the days we are able to put aside all those other things and be on the move with him, we will get to see something more, something new, something beautiful of the kingdom of God. When we get on the move with Jesus, there is no telling what may happen, but it is sure to change our lives.