

Sometimes you take a wrong turn. There's a famous story in our diocese about two priests in the 1980's who were driving south after a clergy conference in Amarillo. Both priests are gone now, but I'm still Facebook friends with both of their sons.

These two priests were heading from Amarillo to the Permian Basin. But just south of downtown Amarillo, they took a wrong turn. They both were EXTREMELY talkative by nature. And that day they were heavily engaged in conversation and didn't notice their error. It was a couple hours later, about the time they should be hitting Lubbock, that they discovered themselves driving into Tucumcari, NM. That one wrong turn in Amarillo cost them an extra 4 hours of driving.

Of course, these days, many of us rely heavily upon GPS. I still keep a few paper maps in my car just in case. But I never use them, because GPS is so convenient. And what's awesome about GPS is that if you get off track, it tells you. Sometimes it tells you to make a U-turn and go back. And sometimes it recalculates a new route that with a change of roads will get you to your destination.

In the Christian life, there is a word for that recalculation and rerouting. It is repentance. In the New Testament there are actually two words that get translated with the English word "repentance." One is used 6 times in the New Testament. And the other is used 66 times.

The first word¹ describes the type of thing that we normally associate with repentance. This word has nuances of being sorry, or having regret, wanting to make a change because you feel bad or remorseful about something. That's our common picture of repentance. And this word was used very commonly in the Greco-Roman world. But this word is only used 6 times in the New Testament.

By contrast there is word for repentance that was rarely used in Greco-Roman culture. Yet this word appears 66 times in the New Testament. This word describes a different kind of repentance. It is *metanoia*. It literally means having a change of mind. But *metanoia* also encompasses having a change of heart or a change of will.

Metanoia repentance is not about feeling bad or remorseful. Instead, *metanoia* repentance is all about making a change. In GPS terms, *metanoia* repentance is about recalculating and rerouting. *Metanoia* repentance about making a U-turn if necessary, or getting off of one road an onto another road.

In a few minutes, I'll be making an invitation to the observance of a holy Lent. And one of the phrases that our liturgy uses is "the need which all Christians continually have to renew their repentance and faith."²

Our services most Sundays contain a time when we can repent and return to God. But this is a relatively brief time in our service. On Ash Wednesday, the penitential portion of

¹ *metamelomai*

² BCP p. 265

the liturgy is 7.5 times longer than it is on an average Sunday. It reminds us of "the need which all Christians continually have to renew their repentance and faith."

It's about recalibrating and rerouting and making a change. And one of the changes Christians have to make is in our outlook.

We humans tend to seek comfort and security. And yet, during this season of Lent, we will be walking with Jesus as he makes his way towards Jerusalem.

As a parish we will be reading through Luke's Gospel together this Lent. And about 40% of the way into Luke, towards the end of chapter 9, we're going to encounter a change in direction. In Luke's words, Jesus will "set his face to go to Jerusalem."³ Or as another translation says, "Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem."⁴

For almost 60% of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus will be heading on a path towards Jerusalem and his Crucifixion. Jesus will be following the path of self-sacrifice. And Jesus follows that path out of obedience to God and out of love for us. Jesus walks that way of love even though it involves Jerusalem and his Passion and his Cross.

And we are invited to follow that path with him. In chapter 9 of Luke, Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem, where he will take up his cross. And in that same chapter, Jesus invites us to deny ourselves, and take up our own crosses, and follow him.⁵

We sometimes think of taking up our cross as stoically carrying some burden through life. We might even say, "That's the cross I bear..."

But Jesus is talking about something different. In his world taking up the cross didn't mean carrying the burdens of life. Taking up the cross meant going to your death.

In different times in history, some Christians have been put to death for their faith. In some parts of our world today, some Christians are still experiencing persecution and death for the sake of Jesus Christ.

But for most of us, taking up our cross will not mean being killed for our faith. Nevertheless, taking up our cross is still about what we're willing to die to or die for. In our baptisms we are buried with Christ in his death so that we might share in his resurrection.

During Lent we often talk about giving something up. But let me ask the question in a stronger form. This Lent, what do you need to bury? This Lent, what do you need to die to?

³ Lk 9:51 NRSV

⁴ Lk 9:51 NIV

⁵ Lk 9:23

If you're wanting to give up something for Lent, maybe consider giving up these things, burying these things, dying to these things: Envy, blame, self-pity, impatience, negativity, doubt, feelings of unworthiness, excuses, fear, needing to please everyone, worry, pride.⁶

Jesus says deny yourself. Maybe a better way to state that is to turn away from selfishness or self-centeredness. Maybe taking up your cross is seeking to put to death those negative things that make you focus on yourself, and to seek to love God more fully, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Maybe taking up the cross for you means you need to put away an attitude of 'it's my way or the highway.' Jesus sets out on a different highway, a road to Jerusalem. It was a road of living and dying on behalf of others. Maybe that's the road you need to be on.

Maybe taking up your cross means praying not only "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Maybe it's also saying, 'God, I want your will to be my choice in my life.' Maybe it's truly praying as Jesus prayed before his death, "Father, not my will but yours be done."⁷

That's recalculating and rerouting. That's *metanoia* repentance, changing our own minds and wills to follow the pattern and the mind of Christ.

Repentance is not about feeling bad. It's not about sorrow or remorse.

Repentance is about making a change in direction. Repentance is about setting your face toward Jerusalem and following your Lord.

May you have a holy and blessed Lent.

⁶ Each of these things and more is the subject of a meditation in *40 Things to Give Up for Lent and Beyond* by Lutheran Pastor Phil Ressler.

⁷ Lk 22:42