

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Ash Wednesday – February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008

### **Mark 10:32-34**

**“They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. “We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”**

Dear Followers of our Lord and Savior,

Have you ever dreaded going somewhere? Maybe it was the dentist office to get a tooth filled. Maybe you dreaded going to school on the day of a big exam. Maybe you dreaded going to Aunt Ethel’s house because you couldn’t stand the distinct odor and the fact that she always had the furnace set at 80 degrees. When we have to go to such places, we look for every excuse in the book not to go.

While a trip to the dentist, the classroom, or Aunt Ethel’s may all be less than inviting, what if we knew the time and place we were going to die? What if we had 100 percent guaranteed information that as soon as we pull into the driveway after services, we will die—would we go home from here? Would we eagerly jump in the car after services and beat the traffic, saying, “I can’t wait to get there”? Probably not. More than likely, we’d book a room at the Holiday Inn and call the moving company to go in and start packing up our things. We would avoid even getting close to our homes again.

Today, as we begin our journey with Jesus on his crossroads, we find ourselves on the longest geographical route we’ll travel over the next six weeks. We’re on the road from the northern region of Galilee to the southern region of Judea. This 75-mile trek would provide ample time for reflection and conversation for Jesus and his disciples. But what’s most amazing about this trek is that they were on it at all. Jesus knew that this road would lead him to the cross. In a sense, this road could be marked “One Way.” He knew he was going to Judea to die. Yet, he went. So let’s lace up our sandals and join the disciples and Jesus on this long journey from:

### **Theme: Crossroads – From Galilee to Judea**

- 1. See Jesus as a leader**
- 2. See Jesus as a teacher**
- 3. See Jesus as the Savior**

## **I. See Jesus as a Leader**

How would you define a leader? Someone once said, “A real leader faces the music, even when he doesn’t like the tune.” Can’t that be said of Jesus in this case? In regard to his human nature, what Jesus was facing must have been overwhelming. Down the road, he could see the Roman hammer driving a nail through his flesh. In the distance, he could feel the spit of mockers oozing down his cheeks. He could hear his friends betraying and denying him. This was the music playing in Jesus’ future—yet he faced it head-on. Our lesson says, **“Jesus [was] leading the way.”** He wasn’t just part of a pilgrim crowd heading to celebrate the Passover. He wasn’t being dragged along for the ride. He was out in front, urging, “C’mon, let’s go.”

Hear him coaching the disciples along the way: “C’mon Peter, you can’t be tired. Let’s pick it up, Philip, c’mon. Let’s get to the next town before dark. Let’s go guys.”

While Jesus was determined to push forward to get to Judea, the emotions of his companions were quite different. Our lesson says that the disciples were “astonished” as they walked this road. They were dumbfounded perhaps because they knew Jerusalem was the hotbed for Jesus’ enemies. They couldn’t understand why Jesus would be so eager to head into enemy territory. Wouldn’t he want to stay in the comfy confines of Capernaum or some other Galilean town? They couldn’t figure it out, and you can bet the disciples were talking privately along the road, discussing why Jesus was pushing forward with such determination. As for the other pilgrims who followed Jesus, there must have been an eerie feeling that hovered over them. Something clued them in that a momentous, perhaps tragic, event was looming. For the Bible simply reports, “[**They**] **were afraid.**”

Now let’s ask, what would we have been thinking if we had been on that road to Judea? Or better yet, what emotions do we experience now as we walk the difficult roads of our faith-life? All too often we mimic the crowd or disciples, don’t we? We fear what lies ahead. We wonder how we’re ever going to get through a difficult situation. We doubt God’s presence in a time of turmoil. We doubt his wisdom. But then, out of the blue, we see Jesus leading. Through his Word, we see his love shining through. Through his Word, we see him grabbing us by the hand, picking us up from the dirt of despair. We hear him say, “C’mon, let’s go. I’ll be with you. Follow me. I’ll lead.” Indeed, when we find ourselves on our own crossroads—crossroads that are far less dangerous than the one Jesus traveled—we still see him leading. We see Christ as our leader.

But there is more to being a good leader than just being out in front, cheering and serving as an example in the face of adversity. A good leader will also take the time to explain his actions to his followers, thus equipping them to face similar adversity in the future. On the crossroad from Galilee to Judea, we see Jesus doing just that. We see Jesus as a teacher.

## II. See Jesus as a Teacher

Our lesson continues, “**Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him.**” The key word here is “**again**”. This is at least the fifth time that Jesus has told his disciples about his upcoming suffering and death. Perhaps there were other times that are not recorded for us in the pages of Scripture. But what’s the big deal that again and again we hear Jesus telling this to his followers? It shows the patience of Jesus. As a teacher, Jesus had every right to bang his head against the wall, frustrated that his pupils just didn’t seem to get it at times. In one instance he says that the first shall be last, but soon afterward we see the disciples arguing about who is the greatest among them. In one scene the disciples witness a miracle, a few hours later they completely forget about Jesus’ power and are scared for their lives. Jesus so easily could have thrown his hands up in disgust and given up on this group. But he didn’t. Rather, time and time again he patiently taught them. And here, on his final trip to Judea, he pulls them aside for one more lesson. One more review before they would face a major test of their faith.

This leads to another point about Christ as a teacher—look at the subject matter he taught his pupils. He didn’t just share the flashy news about himself. He didn’t just wow them with his miracles. He shared the truth—the whole truth—even the parts they maybe didn’t want to hear. He didn’t gloss over the hard-to-swallow teachings. In fact, he called special attention to them. It’s not so much reflected in our NIV translation, but in the original language, Jesus’ prediction begins with an attention-getting word. He says, “Behold!” or, “Listen up!” Then he goes on to say, “**We are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him.**”

If you're a disciple walking this road, what's going on in your head, having heard this? I imagine this news was difficult to face. While they had faith in Jesus as their spiritual Messiah, the disciples also wrestled with the common hope of Jesus being their political Messiah. All this talk of their leader being humiliated and killed dashed such hopes. This is maybe why we heard earlier that they were "astonished." How could their leader escort them into this hornets' nest? Why was he doing this? Should they stop him? Valid questions. Questions that only a masterful teacher could answer. Jesus knew that in the long run, this seemingly gloomy prediction would comfort the disciples. Therefore, he didn't hide it from them. As a great teacher, Jesus knew that months later the disciples would recall this conversation and see how he had taught them that he was in control. They could look back and see that Jesus had taught them how everything that had happened during holy week had been according to God's plan. And imagine the comfort that would eventually bring. Comfort from their teacher.

But it wasn't only the disciples on this crossroad that had Jesus as their teacher. We also are pupils of Jesus, whom he teaches in a similar way. So often we fail to "get it." He invites, "Come to me with your problems," and we seek so many other solutions first. He soothingly says, "You're forgiven," and we beat ourselves up over our sins. He instructs, "Let my Word be your guide," and we choose alternate paths. Yet he's patient with us. Again and again he pulls us aside and speaks to us through his Word. Oh, the message may not always be what we want to hear. We don't always want to hear about the seriousness of our sin. We may not want to hear about how we can expect difficult times as followers of Jesus. We may cringe when that law pierces us so sharply. But in the end, the masterful teacher knows such things are what we need to hear. The law ultimately is for our good because it paves the way for Jesus to teach us the most important truth, the truth he taught his disciples on this crossroad: Not only is he our leader, not only is he our teacher, but most important, he's our Savior. See Christ as the Savior.

### III. See Jesus as the Savior

Jesus drives home this point with a concise little sentence to end the conversation with his disciples. It's almost as if Jesus is describing a boxing match. He piles up one verb upon another, like a boxer taking one little jab after another. He's mocked (jab 1); he's spit on (jab 2); he's flogged (3); he's killed (KO). Jesus falls to the canvas of the tomb, seemingly knocked out for good. But then, with the referee about to slam down his hand for the final count and declare Jesus defeated, Jesus pops up from the canvas and delivers a KO himself. Jesus declares, **"Three days later [I] will rise."**

Unfortunately, the disciples at this time didn't comprehend Jesus' prediction that he would deliver the knockout punch. Luke's gospel reports, **"The disciples did not understand any of this" (18:34)**. They were probably caught thinking about the jabs their leader was about to take. But in the end, they would learn to appreciate the weight of these words. They would learn that these words were more than an empty hope that Jesus held out to them. They would learn these words proved his victory over his enemies. They would look back on these words and see Christ as their Savior.

And that's what we do today as well. As we begin the Lenten season and travel these crossroads with Jesus, our minds can be consumed about all the jabs that our Savior took. During Lent we reflect on how our sins were jabs that landed on him. Now certainly, it's healthy for us to understand the seriousness of our sin. But it's only healthy if we understand that Jesus not only absorbed the jabs, he fought back and won. He conquered our sins. He knocked out our sins. He saved us from our sins. Remember that as we travel these crossroads. Remember that these roads which lead to the agony of the cross merge into another road that takes us to the empty tomb and the glory of eternal life. Traveling with Jesus through the darkness, we are led to see Jesus as the light of heaven. May our Lenten journey, therefore, be a blessing to us as we see Jesus as our leader, our teacher, and our Savior. Amen.