

No Turning Back

John 12:12-16, Isaiah 40:4-9

A sermon given Palm Sunday 2008 at the Union Church of Bay Ridge

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When you're going off the ski jump there's that point where you haven't actually left the starting gate, but once you're past that tipping point, and you aren't even going very fast yet, you're still on the ground, and still there's no turning back.

Okay, I've only seen it on TV, I've never actually gone off the ski jump, but my grandfather did. He was about my age, 54 or 55, when his beloved wife, my grandmother, died suddenly, unexpectedly, of viral pneumonia. She was such a vibrant person, she was a potter too, and without even having met her, all of us grandchildren, they say, have a lot of her in us.

After about a year, my father said, Dad, it's time we went on a ski trip, and off they went to New Hampshire, near Hanover, where there had been the Olympics a few years back. Grandfodder and Dad had a great time together, and Grandfodder was feeling better than he'd ever imagined, this had been just what he needed, and he was feeling so frisky he thought he'd just this once go off that Olympic ski jump they had there.

Well of course he landed in the hospital.

Jesus has been doing anything he can to play it safe, to talk to just a few more people, heal a few more sick ones, give hope to a few more downtrodden ones, and then scurry away before he can be arrested. But he's already told the people close to him that it's inevitable, some day he'll be caught and killed, and he has so much to do before that happens!

But nevertheless, sooner or later he has to come to Jerusalem, confront the powers and principalities, have a showdown with the religious leaders and the Roman government, and now is the time.

So imagine the scene, it's Passover, when everyone who possibly can makes the pilgrimage to the holy city; there are crowds of pilgrims, and crowds of pickpockets and con artists, as well as a few honest tradespeople, all eager to sell various goods and services to the out-of-town visitors, all eager for a profit (prophet?).

And then there would be Roman soldiers, guarding the gate and attempting to keep the peace. And looking for a little rakeoff, no doubt.

The Romans liked peace. They liked order. They liked being in charge, but only because they didn't like surprises. They really only cared about getting the most possible profit out of the colonies. They really didn't care what you believed or even what you did, as long as there was order, and prosperity—for the Romans—as long as you behaved yourself and gave the Romans their cut of whatever you were making off the Passover tourists, or the Temple moneychanging, or whatever.

But now THIS guy—the King of the Jews? Think FIDEL CASTRO. That’s what they heard, those Roman soldiers. This Prophet, this King of the Jews, this wacko, is going to wreak havoc on our peace and our profits.

So from this moment it was inevitable, what would happen to Jesus. There was no turning back. And in the middle of the crowd, he was all alone—except for the Spirit; in all the shouting, a great silence and a still, small voice. Have you ever felt like that?

Now, there was my grandfather lying there all fixed up, in traction, with plenty of time and not much to do, except think, and pray (which I am sure he did, he was a Presbyterian elder), and talk to people, lying there in his hospital bed, and here comes that word from the New Hampshire doctor, the punchline that Grandfodder used to love to tell on himself:

“Serves you right for a dahn fool, trying to act thuhty when you’re fifty!”

What’s that word from the Chinese philosophers, that saying our Jane has on her office wall? *If you keep on doing what you’re doing, you’ll end up where you’re headed.*

We always think that word’s a warning, don’t we, and many times it is. The older we get, the more decisions we have to make from which there is no turning back. And each time, it can feel as though some possibility has died, as though hope diminishes with every passing year. Unless...

Sometimes, just sometimes, there’s an astounding miracle waiting right around the corner, something that changes everything, and you had to be *exactly where you were* in order to receive it.

Because don’t forget the Spirit of the Lord. Sometimes the Spirit of the Lord is just waiting, with a big golden egg, “Now where is she, she was running around down there just a moment ago...” BOOM. And there’s no way that golden egg could have fallen in your path any other way. You had to be *there*, not anywhere else, for it to fall on you.

Who knew that for Jesus and the disciples, beyond suffering and death...lay Resurrection? What a word to comfort the weary!

You see, in that hospital, there was this cute little nurse. And she became the grandmother who used to take *us* skiing, and read us *Eloise*, and teach us to think for ourselves, even in church—that invaluable adult every child needs to save them from their parents—and every parent needs to save them from their children. And like all children, we have something of all of them forever.

Sometimes, like Jesus, you do have to keep on doing what you’re doing, even when you’re all alone and it’s indescribably painful and it doesn’t make any sense, because it’s the only way to wind up where you’re headed, and God is right there with a whole chorus of angels to cheer you on.

AMEN.