

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Well, here we are on the road again.

On the road to Jerusalem.

Metaphorically Jesus and his disciples

have been on this road throughout their ministry.

If today's story sounds a little familiar,

it should.

It was a month ago,

back up the road a bit,

just before they got to Capernaum,

that the disciples were arguing

about who was the greatest among them.

Again Jesus was ahead of them on the road.

Again Jesus was telling them that he was about to be betrayed by one of them

and turned over to the authorities and killed.

Again the disciples weren't listening.

This time, James and John – the sons of thunder,

jog ahead to try and get their dibs in early.

You know the kind.

They may not have the best claim,

but they figure that if they can get in first

they'll get the good spots.

My guess is that the sons of Zebedee lost the earlier argument,

though knowing them they probably didn't lose it by much,

and they hope this extra effort might put them over the top.

One has to be pretty crafty if one is going to slip past that ol' rock Peter.

It gives you an inside glimpse

of the relationship the disciples must have had with each other,  
and with Jesus.

It is, alas, not a very flattering look.

And as is often the case when contemplating the disciples,

it gives us a revealing look

at our own relationship with Christ and with each other.

Or to put it another way,

which disciple is your patron Saint on the road to Jerusalem.

Which of the disciples do you most identify with?

In a few weeks we will be beginning our stewardship pledge drive,

and I thought I might make a few observations a little early.

During our stewardship pledge drive,

as we pray about and plan for our giving in the coming year,

it is vitally important to examine our relationship with God

and with each other,

in addition to our relationship with money.

It is important because we always want to be giving

out of a healthy relationship

and not out of a sick relationship.

It doesn't matter whether we are giving money,

or time,

or anything else.

It doesn't matter whether we are giving to the church,

or to our friends,

or to anyone else.

Giving should be a natural extension of ourselves and who we are,

as well as a reflection of the gifts we have been given.

We should not be giving in an effort to make up for some perceived shortcoming,

real or imagined.

We should not give to impress our neighbors,  
or church,  
or even ourselves.

Giving isn't a contest.

Our pledge isn't dues for a social club.

It's not about being first.

For that matter it's not about being last either.

It's about love.

Loving God,

loving your neighbor,

and loving yourself.

And it is healthy, it springs naturally

out of an awareness of how deeply you are loved by God.

It has nothing to do with rules

and it's definitely not about guilt.

Or it shouldn't be anyway,

and that's the problem.

In our zeal to do the best we can at our fund raising,

we sometimes cross the line.

Indirectly,

and sometimes even directly when we really screw it up,

we can end up making your pledge seem to be

about all those things that I just said it wasn't about.

And that's wrong!

Sadly, even as an institution we suffer from all the same foibles of humanity.

We sin.

We're only human.

And so here we all are,

on the verge of entering this stewardship drive

very much like the disciples on that road to Jerusalem,  
some following closer than others,  
but all following;  
trying to act like good disciples,  
but frequently acting like a pack of Gentiles.  
And through it all Christ loves us  
as always,  
and patiently teaches us  
little by little,  
over and over.  
And we continue wandering along the salvation road,  
trailing along behind our Lord,  
who goes on ahead of us on the way.  
Sometime around the beginning of November  
you will be receiving an envelope with a letter, a pledge card,  
inviting you to take part in the financial support of our ministry together.  
I know it sounds hokey, but it's the truth.  
Without your pledges we would be going nowhere.  
The money you give goes both for the glory of God  
and the wonderfully mundane.  
It helps feed, clothe, and house people in need in Central Missouri  
through our partnerships with  
Common Ground, Samaritan Center, and the Salvation Army,  
and it pays for paper and toner  
to keep us supplied with bulletins for worship every Sunday.  
It helps pay the salaries of a priest in Jefferson City,  
as well as a bishop and staff in St. Louis  
that supports ministry throughout the Eastern half of Missouri.  
Even more importantly,

we gather to share the good news,  
to teach our young  
and to praise God in the middle of Missouri,  
all thanks to you.

I could go on, and maybe I should,  
but I am sure you get the picture.

When you sit down with your family, or spouse, or just the voice in your head,  
to talk about what you will pledge in the coming year,  
think big.

Think about all the little things we have done well together in the past year.

Wonder about the big things that God has in store for us in the year ahead.  
Sure, we have a lot of mundane things to take care of...

Our walls need some paint in spots,  
and the clutter that comes from the results of years in mission.  
They will need our attention and some of our money in the year ahead,  
but there is something else in store.

Something is coming.

We have so much to be thankful for and so much to give.

As we enter into the Requiem and Renaissance program  
and take the time and effort to explore and review  
the literally scores of ministries we do here at Grace,  
we have some serious discernment to do.

What ministries continue to give us joy and fulfillment?

What ministries have become a burden?

Is it time to shuffle ministries so that the joys and burdens

better align with the people who now make up the community of Grace?

Are there some burdens that it may now be time to lay down?

In the five years of entry into, struggle through, and recovery from the pandemic,  
many things about Grace have changed.

We have learned new things, and gathered new people.  
The world we now live in  
is also a very different place than it was before the pandemic.  
And so we will need to find creative and different ways  
to continue to be the special source of Grace to Jefferson City  
that we have always been.

The work we do here, day in and day out is important.  
Indeed, it is changing the world, or at least our little corner of it.  
The one we follow “came not to be served but to serve,  
and to give his life a ransom for many.”

A ransom for each one of us.  
How can we not respond to a love so deep?  
Open your eyes and look around.  
How can we not respond to a need so clear?

Just like the sons of Zebedee, we are able.  
The real question  
is *will we*.

Amen.