

In our church, we follow a system of readings called a lectionary which follows the same pattern of readings every three years. In the Church we are in the season of Easter, and our Gospel readings have been focusing on resurrection appearances of Jesus.

This week and for the next two weeks after this, we will be going back in time, as it were, to before Jesus' death and we will be spending some time in a series of passages from John's Gospel called the Upper Room Discourse. Essentially, the Upper Room Discourse is Jesus' last words to His disciples before He would be betrayed, arrested, and killed. But even before those fateful events of Holy Week, Jesus is preparing His disciples for their road ahead after He dies, rises, and ascends to God the Father.

We will be starting *another* three-week sermon series titled *There and Back Again*. The Son of God left His Father to embark on this earthly mission, and He returned back to His Father. So too, God's chosen people were expelled from the Garden of Eden, yet because of Jesus' journey, we yearn to return to paradise, the heavenly Jerusalem.

But to quote Bilbo Baggins from whom we borrow this series title: “It's a dangerous business... going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to.” We never had to sweat that Jesus' journey would somehow have failed, but what about us? It's a dangerous business embarking on this “there and back again” journey. The Christians' journey of faith has its fair share of twists, turns, and ways to stray from the path. Thank God we don't go alone! In these weeks before Pentecost, we are already anticipating the Holy Spirit to come alongside us to give us what we need. Our sermon series will be reflecting on three provisions the Holy Spirit gives to us weary travelers: perspective.

Today's sermon title: the ends reshape beginnings. And as we reflect on the Holy Words of Jesus from today's Gospel in John 16, we learn **THE HOLY SPIRIT MAKES SENSE OF THE STORY**.

I. Jesus went "There and Back Again" for you. Let's take some time to review some of the basics of the Bible story. Mankind sinned and was kicked out of the Garden of Eden. They lived in a fallen state where man's inclination was corruption and violence. Yet God promised that His Son would come to fix everything. Thus, the Old Testament is a story of a people waiting for this Son. We see many heroes who have qualities who foreshadow this Son, but none quite fit the bill. They all sin and fall short of the glory of God, even the “good” ones.

For years there seemed to be little action. It seemed as though God had abandoned His people. However, things were to change when that long-promised Son and Savior would step onto the scene. Perhaps not in the way you would imagine. Not as a king born in a palace or as a man coming down from the clouds,

but as a little baby. Jesus' journey started as a tiny embryo in a Middle Eastern girl's womb, but the story would grow from there.

Jesus was born in unassuming circumstances: placed in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn. However, His life would be anything but normal. His life would be marked by life-changing teaching, jaw-dropping miracles, and the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins. Some people didn't like this and plotted ways to kill Him.

They got their wish. Jesus was betrayed by one of His inner circle. He was sentenced to death, tortured, and crucified. This was no accident of history or a meaningless tragedy. In doing this, Jesus was bearing the sins of the whole world that they may be forgiven.

Against all expectations, Jesus rose again on the third day. This is how Jesus can say to His disciples, **“So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”** That Easter joy is what we see manifested throughout our Easter accounts and throughout the Book of Acts which details the earliest years of the Church.

But the point today is this: Easter isn't where the story ends. Jesus ascended into heaven to return to the Father and He rules the Universe. But the story doesn't even end there, at Pentecost the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to send God's people on a journey.

And we have a lot of talk about the Holy Spirit in our text today. II. The Holy Spirit makes sense of Jesus' "There and Back Again" Story. Jesus tells us **“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”** Even after Easter, the disciples were still waiting. Easter wasn't enough. Easter wasn't the end of the story. The Spirit of Truth, namely, the Holy Spirit, had to come at Pentecost to help the disciples make sense of Jesus' story.

I remember a conversation with a friend back in college. He said he read the whole Bible and he said it was simply about being a good person. I think we would all say that the Bible has a lot to say about how to live a moral life, but that's not the point of God's Story, the Bible. You can have all the facts about Jesus' “There and Back Again” journey and still get it wrong.

The Holy Spirit guides us into all truth. He will only speak the Words of Jesus. He will glorify Jesus. The key work of the Holy Spirit is one of perspective. The Holy Spirit took the things Jesus taught His disciples and showed what they meant. He helped the disciples make sense of Jesus' story. Jesus was no mere miracle worker or teacher, He is the very Son of God who came to restore fallen creation.

The title of the sermon is “Ends Reshape Beginnings.” Think about how the Spirit of Truth recast all of Peter’s experiences with His Lord. Jesus approached Peter after a miraculous catch of fish and calling Peter to follow Him. Peter followed Jesus, saw His miracles, listened to His teaching, and ate and drank with Him. Peter boldly confessed Jesus as the Christ. Peter almost killed Malchus, the high priest’s servant, defending Jesus. Peter denied Jesus three times. Jesus reinstated Peter three times telling Him, “Feed my sheep.”

The end of the journey at Pentecost reshaped those beginnings as Peter saw that Jesus’ entire mission was about the forgiveness of sins that would result in the restoration of creation and the reconciliation of God with mankind. That gift of perspective transformed Peter and gave him boldness to share His faith with others.

So too, III. The Holy Spirit makes sense of your "There and Back Again" Story. In the second paragraph of our Gospel text, Jesus talks about the contrast of sorrow and joy in that “little while.” Jesus is talking about His death and resurrection being that little while. However, we could broaden that little while to mean more things. Let’s talk about God’s “little while.”

God’s little while of course fits hand in glove with our provision of perspective in this sermon. God’s little while could not only be the three days of Jesus’ rest in the tomb. God’s little while could be the entirety of the disciples’ lives where they would eventually be reunited with Christ in Heaven. Could we even say God’s little while is the time between the Ascension of Christ to Heaven and Christ’s return for which we are still waiting?

Ends reshape beginnings and each of those ends gives new perspective to what came before. Easter turned the disciples’ sorrow into joy. Pentecost lit a fire on the disciples and electrified their lives. Doubtless we will say the same thing as we look forward to meeting Jesus in heaven, and doubly so as we await the new heaven and the new earth as described in Revelation 21.

“When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.” Ends reshape beginnings and the Holy Spirit makes sense of your story. I don’t know a single mother who regrets having a baby even though the process was excruciating.

“It’s a dangerous business... going out your door.” Yet the Holy Spirit arms us with perspective to get through this life’s journey. No matter what you’re going through, understand that because Jesus has gone “There and Back Again” for you, you have heaven waiting for you. You may not always understand why things happen the way they do but arm yourself with God’s Word to help you get through. The Holy Spirit will use it to guide you into all truth, and perhaps only in the rearview mirror. But as forgiven children of God we can venture out boldly, and trust that we will make it “there and back again.”