

OPEN MINDS, BURNING HEARTS

Journeying through Luke's Gospel: III. The Jerusalem Road

Text: Luke 9:51-62

1. Intentionality: Jesus on the Move

This stop on the journey is not strictly **one** location, but a road between two places: between Jesus' ministry in Galilee (where he has identified his focus as marginality) and his destination (in the full sense of the word): where his destiny is taking him, Jerusalem, the holy city, and its Temple, the place where Luke's story began. We are going full-circle. So in a real sense, the journey really starts here: "When the days of his assumption/lifting up were being fulfilled, he set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51).



This session will consider:

- 1) How the journey begins.
- 2) What the Jerusalem Road might mean (and when we read slowly, and in the light of our own experience and our own expectations about Jerusalem, we realize that its meaning is multi-layered).

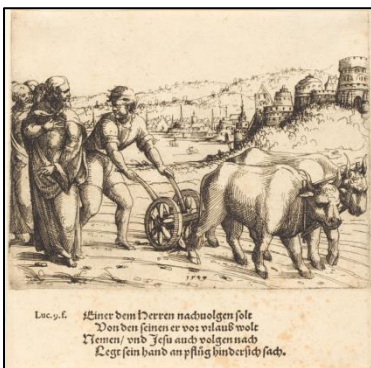
2. The Beginning of the Journey: Preparing for Jesus' Assumption

(Luke 9:51-62):

1) What Luke actually writes at 9:51 is 'When the days of his lifting up/assumption were being fulfilled ...': although for Catholics, the word 'assumption' recalls the Assumption of Mary, for Jews it would have recalled OT figures believed to have been assumed into heaven (Enoch, Moses, Elijah).

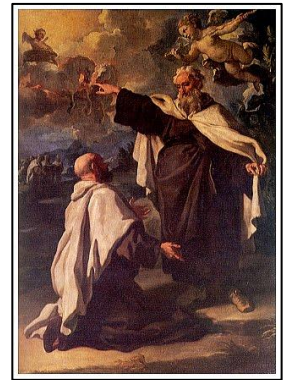
2) Link with Elijah is particularly instructive, because what James and John want to do (call down fire from heaven onto the hostile Samaritan village) recalls Elijah calling down fire from heaven to consume soldiers of the king of Samaria (2 Kgs 1); but Jesus refuses (he is both like and unlike Elijah).

3) Just as the episode in the synagogue in Nazareth at the beginning of Jesus' Galilean ministry ended in hostility and rejection, so he faces rejection at the beginning of his journey to Jerusalem (from the Samaritans, opposition can come from outsiders as well as insiders).



4) Luke 9:61-62 NRSV ("Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God") recalls story of Elijah calling Elisha to be his successor, in which Elisha is ploughing when Elijah calls him, and allowed to go back home and kiss his father and mother before following (1 Kgs 19:20). Here, following the prophet Jesus is so urgent that there can be no turning back once one has put one's hand to the plough.

5) Jesus, like Elijah, has a prophetic mission to fulfil (although he is as much *unlike* Elijah as he is like him); Jesus, like Elijah, is soon to be taken up in heaven; Jesus, like Elijah, has disciples, successors, who are being prepared for their ongoing role; and being a disciple costs no less than everything.



3. Luke's Travel Narrative: the Meanings of the Journey to Jerusalem

This particular journey to Jerusalem is fundamental for Luke:

1) It dominates Luke's central section: ten chapters out of 24 ('discourse time' – the time devoted to recounting a particular event slows down. This literary form of travel narrative is also the setting for teaching along the way, preparing followers and readers for the future).

1:1-4	1:5-2:52	3:1-4:13	4:14-9:50	9:51-19:28	19:29-21:38	22-24
Prologue	Infancy Narrative	Preparation for ministry	Ministry in Galilee *	Journey to Jerusalem	Ministry in Jerusalem	Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension

2) *Dei Verbum* 12 reminds us of the need to pay attention to the particular literary forms an author is using, and the ground-rules for interpreting them; Luke uses literary convention of the travel narrative (e.g. Moses in Deuteronomy; Paul in Acts), which serves as a setting, a convenient peg for teaching both the characters, and the readers.

"Now since in Sacred Scripture God has spoken through human agents and in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to ascertain what God himself wished to communicate with us, should carefully search out what the sacred writers truly intended to express and what God thought well to manifest by their words" (*Dei Verbum* 12).

3) Journey itself at times disappears into the background, so Luke has to remind us of the fact (e.g. Luke 12:1; 13:22, 33; 19:11, 28).

4) On the story level, it is a Passover pilgrimage (celebrating God's act of preservation in Egypt, and God's great act of liberation from Egypt).

5) Luke's Transfiguration story has explicitly named this journey as Jesus' 'Exodus' which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem; this particular Passover pilgrimage is to be the setting for a New Exodus.



4. Reading (and Travelling) Slowly: Being Transformed on the Road

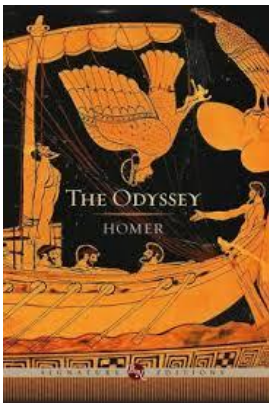
On a deeper level, the journey of Jesus and the disciples to Jerusalem is **our journey**:

1. Luke's travel narrative is a very peculiar kind of journey, because for chapter after chapter Jesus and the disciples don't seem to make very much progress. They meander; they stop at all kinds of places; the narrative is very fragmented and rather episodic (untypical of Luke).



Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* [Ezra Winter, Library of Congress; photo in public domain]

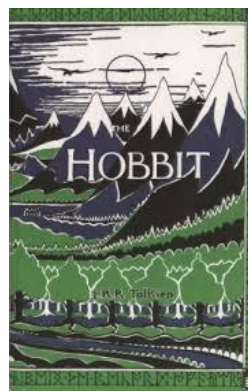
2. Pilgrimage is a particular kind of journey (e.g. the Camino to Compostella; Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*): experience of being taken out of our ordinary lives, and the journey itself as transformative.



Homer, *The Odyssey*



Virgil, *The Aeneid*



J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again*



3. But it is transformative in the mixture of the ordinary and the extraordinary: placing one step in front of another; one step at a time. And this is Luke's paradigm for the Christian life (taking up one's cross *daily*).