

SERMON: "FROM RIGHT ANSWER TO WRONG MOVE"
TEXT: OLD TESTAMENT JEREMIAH 15:15-21
NEW TESTAMENT MATTHEW 16:21-28

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INTRODUCTION

Beth and I drove to North Carolina two weeks ago for a big party
Birthday number one for our grandson Leo. He is the son of our oldest son
Durham and his wife Anna. Our middle children, the twins were also there
Sophie Ann flew down from New York City, Jerry and his husband Alex
drove to Greensboro from their home in Asheville, 2 ½ hours away

We drove two days worth of driving – Iowa, Illinois, Ohio, Kentucky,
West Virginia, Virginia and finally 16 hours later ... North Carolina
We had plenty of time together in the car there and back

So here's my question, one for married couples who have been married
longer than we have (say 30 plus years) ... Do y'all still argue about
the best way to get there (wherever there is). Or are we the only ones?

There are lots of ways to get from Iowa to North Carolina
Lots of options, good directions from Google maps, Alexa
and of course your spouse who may on occasion offer said directions
with a 'plainspoken' sense of certainty, urgency and diplomacy

Now before I get in more trouble with my wife, a reminder just for her.
Remember when we followed Google directions, ended up on a gravel road
in the middle of Iowa (130th the street it said). Remember what I said,
"If I'm going to get lost anywhere, I want it to be with you."

Alright, I dug that hole and started climbing out of it to talk about directions
And not just in a Google maps kind of sense. I mean the direction
of our lives ... where we are and where we go from here
And whose directions we follow

Our story today is a continuation of the story from last week
Jesus and his disciples on a retreat of sorts in Baniyas, Caesarea Phillipi
From there they will make their way to Jerusalem
This is where Jesus and his followers change directions – big time.

The disciples expect something big to happen when they get to Jerusalem
Jesus does too. But the two sets of expectations are quite different.
One biblical scholar refers to these as the ways of Crown and Cross

CROWN AND CROSS

Jesus knows this and begins here in Caesarea Phillipi to point out that difference
He lets them what is going to happen, what he will do and how he will do it
What he says first here, he will say again a total of three times.
pointing ahead to his death and resurrection.
He begins with the question of who they say he is

He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven ...

Maybe you noticed the sermon title, ‘From Right Answer to Wrong Move’
This is that right answer. Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus lets Peter know he got it right and goes further telling Peter he is the rock on which Christ will build his church. Peter has got to be feeling good hearing that!

That will change and change very abruptly with what Jesus says next when he tells them about the way of the cross, the way he will be going. The next verse, verse 21 marks a watershed moment

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised.

This is not at all what the disciples expected to hear, what they wanted to hear. This isn't taking Israel back from the Romans. This isn't even taking Jesus' message and miracles to a large audience, helping more people
This talk of suffering and death, this way of the cross shocks the disciples ... “You're going to do what?”

Peter, in his own outspoken way, speaks for all of them
And not just them, but us too. Maybe he's a bit too direct, too dramatic
But again he says what we are thinking.

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” But Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

JESUS' OFFERS DIRECTIONS

The scholar I referenced earlier, who talked about differing expectations of Jesus as the ways of Cross and Crown describes the exchange between Jesus and Peter this way

This is just too much for Peter. His first act as leader-in-waiting for the Jesus movement is to say "no" to Jesus. Saying "no" to the way of Jesus will become a habit for the Church. Too often when Jesus says "Cross!" the church votes "Crown!"

Peter went from right answer to wrong move quite quickly
He did so by telling Jesus "No, you can't do that. God forbid it!"
Jesus response is just as blunt ... "Get behind me, Satan."

Now I'm not suggesting we've had equally as intense exchanges with Jesus
But, let's be honest, we have had our disagreements
Like Peter (and the others) we would have preferred Jesus
do things differently, go in a different direction

We're thinking more conquering king than suffering servant
We're not thinking the way of the cross. We're thinking the way of the crown
We're thinking taking on Rome (or Des Moines or DC)
We're not thinking about him taking on the sins of the world.
Taking them unto himself, dying on a cross.

What kind of leader does that? Jesus does
And he expects that of his followers, to follow the way of the cross
Remember these verses have him go on to tell his disciples ...
**"If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves
and take up their cross and follow me."**

Those are quite the directions, are they not?
Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow

Well then, let me try and bring this back round and once again
tie the directions we get with the arguments we have had and will have
In particular I want you to imagine a journey with Jesus
Maybe from Iowa to North Carolina, maybe just to work
or out with friends or a back and forth over the internet

Now 62 years of age I am old enough and, I pray, open enough
to learn from my experiences. I'd like to think that one of the things
I have learned is not only how to argue with the people I love
but so much more critically ... how to lose an argument

SUMMARY

I've lost plenty of them and will lose plenty more ...

Especially my arguments with Jesus

Now. Speaking of being open and honest ...

Haven't you, like Peter and your pastor, had some arguments with Jesus?

And if you say you have not, what does that mean?

Does it mean you are exceptionally good at 'Follow the Leader?'

Or does it mean that you believe Jesus agrees with you all the time?

If the later is the case, that Jesus always and easily agrees with you
might I suggest two possibilities.

One – how about you and Jesus drive for two days from Iowa to NC,
through Indianapolis construction at rush hour and the West Virginia
mountains and see if any arguments about directions come up along the way

Two – open yourself up to learning how to lose an argument

Oh, and another thing. Very important

Jesus loves you enough to argue with you,

forgive you and keep on traveling with you

all the way to heaven