

## Sermon for March 23, 2008: The Road Goes Ever Ever On

Jeremiah 23: 1-8

Luke 24: 1-12

Fans of The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings trilogy will recognize the title of today's sermon. It comes from the first line of a poem that Bilbo Baggins spontaneously declaims as he and Gandalf the wizard are returning from their adventures at the Lonely Mountain, the quest for dwarvish gold, the battle with Smaug the dragon, and the Battle of the Five Armies, which are all recounted in JRR Tolkien's The Hobbit. That first verse is also sung by Bilbo as he sets out for Rivendell after leaving the ring of power to his nephew, Frodo, immediately after Bilbo's one hundred and eleventh birthday party, in the first movie of the LOTR trilogy, The Fellowship of the Ring. The song recounts Bilbo's adventures over hills and under tree, through caves, by streams that never find the sea, and so on, until his eyes, "that fire and sword have seen and horror in the halls of stone look at last on meadows green and trees and hills they long have known," as he is able, at long last, to get a glimpse of his own home, The Hill, in the distance.

At Easter we are able to get a glimpse of our own home, in the distance. The women – Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them – are the first ones to get the idea that the road they have been traveling with Jesus has not ended after all. They thought that the road had ended three days before, on the hill called Golgotha, when they saw Jesus murdered by crucifixion. They had watched as Joseph of Arimathea came, claiming Jesus' body, wrapping it in a linen shroud, and placing it in a tomb that had never been used before. But because the crucifixion had occurred on the eve of the Sabbath, they were not able to anoint His body with the spices and oils that a good Jewish burial called for at that time. So early the morning after the Sabbath, off they went down that road, to do one last thing for their Rabbi. They thought that the end of the road had been reached. They thought they were performing one final act of respect to their beloved Master. They just hadn't understood Jesus' words about resurrection, and going before them into Galilee, and returning to the Father. To their shock, they discovered that the road was NOT ended; in

fact, in some ways the adventure was just really beginning. People didn't believe them at first, not even the disciples, not that part about Jesus rising from the dead, according to the two men in dazzling clothes who appeared to them to tell them that Jesus was risen – although, in Luke, Peter is curious enough to at least go and look. But as they are getting ready to step out on this unexpected continuation of the road that had started some 33 odd years ago in Bethlehem, they may have gotten a glimpse of the road that goes ever ever on, until we also get to arrive at our real home.

Jesus is still serving as the good shepherd, gathering His flock from the land of the north, and out of all of the other lands where they have been driven. He puts His call into their hearts, into OUR hearts, so that we know we have been redeemed and saved by grace. That amazing grace – and how sweet that sound is! – has saved wretches like us throughout the centuries, as it has put us onto new roads, roads that go ever ever on, as we are called to share this good news with this lost and broken world that needs it so very much, and now more than ever! Paul wrote, in his letter to the Romans, 10: 9-17:

**because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.”**

**For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.”**

On this road that goes ever ever on, we are charged to remember, and to tell. We are called to tell with our mouths, and our actions, who we serve, and why – out of gratitude for the amazing grace that He has lavished on us. So may we respond with gratitude on this road, that started in Bethlehem, and has passed through Jerusalem, and is now calling us on to new and marvelous things, until we too catch a glimpse of our REAL home. And even so, come soon, Lord Jesus. Amen

Jeremiah 23: 1-8

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD. Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD. The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness." Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when it shall no longer be said, "As the LORD lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt," but "As the LORD lives who brought out and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where He had driven them." Then they shall live in their own land.

Luke 24: 1-12

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.