

During the time of King Herod of Judea, during Jesus's lifetime there were eleven outdoor amphitheatres west of the Jordan where theatrical events took place. There were theaters at Sepphoris, Hammat-Gader, Beth-Shean, Legio, Shumi, Dor, Caesarea, Samaria, Shechem, Jericho, Elusa. *East of the Jordan* there were *eighteen* more theaters that we know of : although archeologists suspect that additional theatres will likely be uncovered. So, Jesus grew up in a world that was saturated in theater, a world where people learned things through Greek dramas and Jewish parables and neighborly story-telling. And this is how the Gospel of Mark, the gospel that we have been listening to for the past eight weeks in church, was first introduced into the world: as a story, an urgent story, spoken aloud in front of a crowd. So, in honor of the Gospel of Mark, spoken aloud in a world saturated with theater, I have a story to tell you; an old story transposed to the present day.

It was dark and stormy night. In New England. Jesus is driving. The disciples are all crammed in the back seat because they don't know the way to where they are going. Mark elbows John. John kicks Judas. Jesus looks over his shoulder, hoping to calm the waters.

Look, he says. There is a terrible horrible truth that is at the core of things to come. This is my story and the way I must walk.

The disciples at this point are a bit like a family. I know it's like my family. Maybe it's a little bit like your family. I imagine there are empty food containers and pieces of sports equipment all over the place. Thomas has a bassoon. Peter is playing the saxophone. In any case, given all the noise and jockeying for position, the disciples can't quite hear what Jesus is saying, because they are fighting over who gets to sit in the front seat on the way back. Two hours later, the disciples are still in the back seat because they still don't know the way to where they are going which is ironic because they are going home.

Peter pipes up. *How long til we get there?*

Jesus looks over his shoulder again and sighs. Philip jostles Andrew who jolts Bartholomew who spills Simon's drink.

Jesus tries again. *Look...There is a terrible horrible possibly beautiful truth that is at the core of things to come. It is my story and the way I must walk.*

There is a long pause

I am going to die, he says

Peter undoes his seat belt and flinging his arms around Jesus's neck, tries to launch himself into the front seat.

No! he cries. *That can't be true. We need you. Here! Now. With us!*

Sit down Peter, Jesus says. *Don't tempt me.*

Jesus continues *As I was saying, there is a terrible, horrible, beautiful and possibly redemptive truth at the core of everything that is both*

my story and the way I must walk and it is also simply who I am. And if you want to follow me you are going to have to walk that way too.

No, says Peter, staying in the back.

Thank you for keeping your seat, Peter, Jesus said

A few minutes later Jesus pulls over. He sees Mary and Martha and Lydia and some other woman named Juno and a maybe eunuch and good samaritan or two on the side of the road.

They are supposed to be here too, Jesus says. *Move over.*

And then he repeats himself for a third time with a bit more detail hoping perhaps that a little suspense and maybe even some gore will make them listen

There is a terrible horrible beautiful redemptive truth at the core of everything that is both my story and the way I must walk and the way you must walk if you will follow me. And ... it's going to get ugly. There will be spitting and hitting and torture and pain and I wish I could save you from this...I really do...I wish at times I could save myself....and yet still...it is the way I must walk and who I am and why I am here and why we are all right here right now in this car together.

There is an awkward silence

We are ready! James and John pipe up from the back seat. *We've been listening from the beginning!*

Well, interrupts Peter *except for that time when John hit me and I spilled my drink but... sure ok, most of the time. We are your inner circle.*

Well, begins Jesus, warming up, momentarily pleased that at least some of them appear to be listening But of course they aren't

listening anymore. They are squabbling over who will get the window seat in his glory.

A little while later Jesus stops the car. He turns around to face them.

There is a terrible, horrible, beautiful and redemptive truth at the core of everything that is my story and the way I must walk and it is your story too. More and more people need to come in. You are repeatedly going to have to move over. There will be pain and bloodshed and senseless violence. And then later, much later, a lot of people will leave and that will be hard too. Your job is to keep going.

There is silence in the car.

Thomas cries out: *But Jesus, we don't know the way!*

And Jesus first takes Thomas's worried face in his hands.

I am the way, he says.

And then he takes hold of James' face.

When you follow me, hope never dies, he says *even when it hurts*.

Then, he turns to Martha.

Martha, I realize this won't make any sense to you for a long, long, long, long time but thank you for doing the dishes.

And then he looks at Judas

The way of the world is not the only way, Judas. There is forgiveness.

And then he looks at each of the disciples in turn.

You were always first in my heart, he says to each and every one of them. *I know every hair on your head. I will be with you to the end of the age.*

And then he gets out of the car.

See how I am going ahead of you to prepare a place for you, he says then. *Love one another,* he says.

And then off he went.

So here we are, altogether in this car. Over the years a lot of people have come in. And a lot of people have left. There will always be matters of interpretation, differences of opinion, personal preferences and a spilled drink or two. But what is our next move? Given who we are in this time and in this place with these companions and these gifts and this heart ache and these limitations? How are we called to follow the way of love?

The world has changed so much since we were last together. on a regular basis And i think it's like humpty dumpty said. We aren't going to go back together again exactly the same. It's been almost 2 years since we had a Christmas fair. The warming center has been taken over by the city, but plans for it remain uncertain. A Christian ballet company is upstairs. Winter is coming. There is a stage in front of the building that will come down this week but has hosted over 26 performances this summer, including Friday night when some 60 people came and went, listening to our praise band. A streaming center is being built *this afternoon*. There is certainly new life here but the process of bringing it alive has been bumpy. New life is always bumpy.

So, especially now after what has been a traumatic season for all of us, when in spite of new hopes for the future, many of us

are carrying griefs we were too anxious to feel before and a lot of us feel strangely overwhelmed.

So, how might coming to church help you figure out what is yours **to put down**? And how might being together help us hear what is ours **to pick up**?

Where is your overwhelm? And where is our joy?

At our vestry retreat two weeks ago we broke into pairs and metaphorically at least, held each other's faces in our hands and asked: *What is breaking our heart* and listened in silence to each other's answers. And then we waited and asked each other a second question: *What brings you fully alive?*

So, what is our next move as individuals? And what is our next move as a parish that cares about our community and has weathered a lot of change?

Given who we are in this time and in this place, with these companions and these gifts and this heart ache and these limitations, How are we called to follow the way of love?

It starts I think with listening to the other people in the car: to our own muffled hearts and to each other and to Jesus as he calls out to us from the road ahead.

What is breaking your heart? What brings you alive? How are you called to serve the larger community?

It's time to listen.

In the name of God the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit

Amen

