

Pentecost 22, Proper 27, Year A, 2014
St James Episcopal Church, St James NY
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About ten years ago, I decided to go on a walk.
A long walk.
Eighty four miles
along the line of Hadrian's Wall,
the wall built across northern England by the Emperor Hadrian
to keep the wild Scots at bay.
The wall is still there, nineteen hundred years later,
or at least some of it;
long straight runs of two parallel lines of carefully quarried stones,
the gap in between filled with rubble,
and sharp corners on cliff edges with the remains of watchtowers.
Other places the only evidence
is a ditch and parallel mound of earth,
all that remains of the vallum,
an additional fortification usually topped with sharp wooden stakes.
The Romans were known
for taking the most direct route;
so the wall pays little attention to the contours of the landscape,
running as straight as possible
from the mouth of the Tyne River on the North Sea
to the Solway Firth and the Irish Sea,
up and down, up and down over the moors,
pausing only to cross rivers and avoid cliffs.

Walking along Hadrian's Wall is an amazing experience of treading in the footprints of history,
walking where so many others have walked
over hundreds and hundreds of years.

This last six weeks in our parish
we have reflected on what it means to be "walking the way."
Not the way of Hadrian's Wall,
but the way of Jesus.
And while we don't literally mean
walking a particular route, whether it be Hadrian's Wall, the Camino de Santiago in Spain
or the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem,
"Walking the Way" is more than a metaphor.

Because what we have been talking about

is living our lives
as followers of Jesus,
living out those two commandments that Jesus said were the greatest,
loving God with all our hearts and minds and souls and strength,
and loving our neighbors
as ourselves,
We've been asking questions
about how it is
that our daily lives
reflect our faith,
from the first step when we get out of bed in the morning
to the last, when we stop and rest,
preparing for a new day.
And we've had a particular focus
on what that means for us as stewards,
how it is that we use our time and talents and money
in God's service.

For the most part, our gospel readings
have gone along with our theme,
helping us to focus more closely
on walking the way with Jesus.

But today's is not so useful.
Our bishop
offers us a reflection in our bulletin insert today,
but it is our Old Testament reading
that not only sums up this theme of Walking the Way,
but leaves us with a challenge.

And in it
we hear the story of the people of God
when they have finally made it
into the promised land.
We've been reading their story for months,
from those first steps of freedom
as they escaped from Pharaoh and slavery in Egypt,
miraculously crossed the Red Sea,
wandered disobediently in the desert,
and then finally reached the Jordan River,
and again God brought them safely
through the water.

And they are finally in
the promised
land.
They are on a high. They've finally made it.
All that time
wandering in the desert,
and the stories from their parents and grandparents
of slavery,
and the promises,
and the fear and the hope.
But here they are
in the promised land.

But that's not the end
of the story.
Joshua
who took over from Moses
right before they crossed the Jordan,
Joshua calls them all together
and reminds them
of what has happened.
Not just the story of the Exodus,
but stretching back
to the time of Abraham
when God had chosen to be their God
and them to be God's people.

And then he challenges them.
Choose today who you will serve.

"Of course we will serve God,"
they say, high on the euphoria of safe arrival.
"Of course we will serve God."

But Joshua knows
and we know
that it's not that simple.
Because time and time again
they've been tempted not to serve God
but to curse him.
time and time again
they've mumbled and moaned
every time

things got a little bit difficult.

Joshua knows, God knows
that life in the promised land
will not be perfect.
And the people will be tempted, tempted again
to find security
in other places than God.
In the little statues
that are the household gods
of the local people.
In their own success.
In their wealth.
In anything
and everything
that might take the place of God
when they are afraid, or angry, or even
celebrating.
Choosing to serve God
will be something they have to do again
and again and again, something that will shape
the whole of their lives.
“Choose who you will serve.”

And they say,
“We will serve the Lord.”

God puts the same choice before us.
“Choose who you will serve.”
Chose who you will serve.

And just like the people of God back in the book of Genesis
choosing to serve God
is a serious decision,
one that continues to shape the whole of our lives.
Because we are always tempted
to serve things other than God.
Things become tough and we mumble and moan.
We find ourselves busy
and so we skip on worshipping God.
Things are tight financially
and so we give less to God.

Over the last few weeks
and indeed, over the last few years,
you have heard people in this parish speaking of how they have chosen to serve God.
Who can forget
Donna and her apples last stewardship season!

Choosing God
mean putting God first
time and time and time again.
Loving God with our hearts and minds and souls and strength.
With our time,
our gifts,
our money.
And so today,
as we end our formal stewardship campaign
and as we offer up our pledges,
I ask you the same question that Joshua asked:
How will you walk the way?
How will you serve God this year?