

We have just been on a journey through the story of the Passion. We have just been on a journey around this city block. We have been on a journey through Lent. We are coming to the end of that journey as we head into Holy Week. Journeys are a part of our lives – they come big or small, with joy and sometimes sadness. Our journey through Lent may have been one of contemplation and reflection where our chosen Lenten discipline has helped us look at our spiritual life or maybe we barely noticed Lent.

Perhaps we were not able to do what we had planned or just weren't in a place where we could reflect.

During the Sundays of Lent, the stories of Jesus have been told. We started with Jesus' baptism and the beginning of his ministry, and ended with the crying of a troubled soul to his Father who responds from the heavens. Today we are at Palm Sunday having marched into Jerusalem waving our Palm branches only to end up at the garden at Gethsemane where Jesus prays and the disciples fell asleep. We quickly go from there to the courtyard of the high priest where Jesus is questioned and then to Pilate's palace where Jesus is condemned to death. Finally we arrive at Golgotha and Jesus is crucified.

What a journey! It happened so long ago and so far away and yet we walk it year after year immersing ourselves into the experience. It is a powerful story. Each year I feel myself caught up in different aspects of this journey. This year, I found myself wanting to know how far – how far was it from the garden to the high priest's courtyard? How far did Peter follow cautiously in the background as Jesus was taken away? How long did Jesus have to walk wondering how this was all going to play out? How long did it take to get to Pilate's palace? How long did it take to walk to Golgotha with the crowds all around? We move so quickly from one scene to another in the reading of the Passion that it is hard to get a sense of the journey – the walking - the time it took to get there. Our reading of the Passion story is over in about 10 minutes.

I looked up the distances to get a better sense of them, and then I transposed them to Washington DC to get a better idea of how far it was. I'd like to share that with you. I'd like to give a disclaimer here that the distances are approximate, and that I did not try to find places in DC that were similar to the terrain of the direction of the roads in Jerusalem.

So for us in the Washington DC, the distance from the Garden of Gethsemane to the High Priests Courtyard would have been like coming from somewhere in Capitol Hill say around 14 St. NE, not too close, and walking to the White House. For you Virginia folk, it would be like coming from Arlington- just across the bridge, say from Pentagon Row to the White House. The trip to Pilate's place from the high priest's courtyard was

not much shorter - probably close to going from the White House to the Capitol. Walking to Golgotha would be similar to going from the Capitol to the Monument. It is a small hill which is probably doesn't come close to the hill on which Jesus was crucified. Even though we can imagine how long these distances are, and can imagine walking them, it doesn't really take us into the heart of Jesus' journey. Jesus' journey wasn't a stroll around the tidal basin to look at the cherry blossoms. Jesus journey wasn't like walking from the Capitol to the monument to look at the sights. It was more than covering the distance.

Jesus' journey to the cross was more like the journey that you take while you are waiting for hours and hours for a loved one to come out of the operating room - when five minutes is an eternity. Jesus' journey is the kind of journey that you take when you walk a family member with terminal illness through the last months of their life. This is the kind of journey that take when you wait for your son or daughter serving in Iraq to come home – wondering each day if they are alive. This is the journey you take as you try to figure out how to have enough money to get through the next month and feed your family. This is the journey that you take after the death of a parent, spouse or a child when you go through each day wondering when the pain will subside and whether you will ever get accustomed to living on this earth without them. These are the journeys of the pain of the world.

The message of the Passion is that Jesus has walked all of these journeys and knows the pain of the world. Jesus lived on this earth. He breathed the air of this earth. He walked the roads that we walked and continues to walk the roads that we walk. Jesus' journey from Gethsemane to the cross lets us know that Jesus is with us on all our other journeys in the world. Jesus took this journey so that we would know that he does know our pain – the trials of our lives. The journey from Gethsemane to the cross is at the heart of who we are as Christians. It reminds us that we have a God who loved us so much that Godself was born into this world and gave himself over to the some of the worst things that the world has to offer so that we could know the greatness of God's love.

As we re-live this journey with Jesus, especially as we begin this Holy Week, remember that Jesus is walking with us on our streets and in our lives. God is with us through all the ups and downs of life, in the most difficult times and in the times when we are just journeying through life. God is with us through going to work, through our marriage, having kids, growing old, getting sick, having spiritual awakenings and then spiritual doubts. God is with us through all of it, and at the end of all of it God is waiting for us. Remember that as we travel through our journeys in life, Jesus, who took that journey to the cross, is next to us every step of the way.