**The Journey Continues**

**Text: 1 Kings 5:1-12**

**Preached by Bruce D. Ervin**

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You may have seen in the news last month that the Washington Monument has reopened. It was closed for 3 years for renovations.

How many of you all have been to the top of the Washington Monument? How many of you climbed the steps? I did, when I was young and dumb. I’m not sure what possessed me to do it because I’d injured my hip a few weeks earlier. I had no business scaling that 555 foot obelisk and climbing those 898 steps. But after I got going, it didn’t seem to be so bad. And it didn’t take too long before I looked-up and saw that I had only a few more flights of stairs to go. After climbing what seemed like those few flights I looked up again. Well, there were still a few more flights to go. So, I climbed some more, and then I looked-up, and oh my goodness there were *still* a few more flights to go.

It’s like my dad said when we were hiking in the mountains: “The top is not always the top.” You think you’ve almost arrived, only to discover that what you *thought* was the top was just a landing, or a ridge, and there’s still a long way to go!

King Solomon thought that he’d arrived. Four years after succeeding his father, King David, he’s fought some wars and consolidated his power and by the time we pick-up the story in 1 Kings 5, he’s sitting pretty. Now it’s time to build. First thing Solomon wants to build is a Temple. He wants to build a house for the Lord.

What Solomon doesn’t understand is that we never really arrive. Not in this life, anyway. The top is not really the top. The goal is never the *ultimate* goal. Whenever we accomplish something, however great it might be, God has another adventure waiting for us; God has an even *greater* goal that God has placed before us. And maybe Solomon, like many of the kings after him – and sometimes we ourselves – maybe Solomon got way too complacent with the status quo.

We never really arrive. On this side of the Kingdom of God, the journey continues.

We’re not there yet. That’s the first of three things that I want to talk about this morning: We’re not there yet; and where you thought you were never was; but, wherever we are, God is.

We’re not there yet. But King Solomon, even in all of his wisdom, didn’t know that. Building the Temple would be the final step in consolidating his power. Jerusalem was to be the seat of both religious and political power, with Solomon in control.

That’s what Solomon thought; but others weren’t so sure. There is, in fact, a debate in the scriptures about whether or not building the Temple is a good idea. It’s part of a larger debate in the Bible about complacency with the way things are verses moving on toward how things ought to be.

The King wants to build this fancy house of worship, made from the finest timbers in Lebanon. He even signs a treaty with his neighbor, King Hiram, to get his hands on that Lebanese cedar, and on the Lebanese slaves who will build it.

But others argue that they don’t need a Temple. They already have a perfectly good house of worship. It’s called a tabernacle – a tent, really – and they’ve used it ever since their escape from Egypt. Think of it as a portable temple. As they journeyed from Egypt to the Promise Land, they might stop for a while and they’d set-up the tabernacle and place the Ark of the Covenant in it, and it served as God’s House while they were on the move.

Should we build a Temple? No, we already have the tabernacle. So, the debate raged, and as I said, this is part of a larger debate about power and authority that runs throughout the Bible. There is within the scriptures an establishment tradition and a prophetic tradition. The establishment tradition praises the status quo and defends those in power, the prophetic tradition attacks the status quo and says, “We can do better than this.” The establishment tradition says, “We’ve arrived” and the prophetic tradition says, “The journey continues.”

The debate starts in Genesis, but it heats up in 1 Samuel. The people cry out, “We want a king!” And God replies, “Okay, you want a king, I’ll give you a king. But listen, here’s what this king will do: he’ll steal your land and enslave your children!” The establishment tradition says the monarchy is a good idea, the prophetic tradition says that the king will be an oppressive jerk. The people got their king. Round one goes to the establishment.

Next the king wants to build a Temple. The prophetic tradition says, “No, no; we’ve got this tabernacle.” The Temple gets built. Round two goes to the establishment.

Well, most of the kings do turn out to be jerks, and prophets like Micah and Isaiah are very critical of the status quo. They say, “God will judge us and Jerusalem will fall.” But the establishment says, “Oh no, Jerusalem will never fall; God has made a covenant with King David and his descendants forever.” Of course, Jerusalem does fall; the Babylonians destroy it. Round 3 goes to the prophets.

Back and forth the debate goes, from Genesis to Revelation, and on to the present age: have we arrived, or should we push on? Is the status quo good enough, or should we try for something better? Should we be complacent, or are we compelled to keep moving?

On a very practical level, one should be concerned about complacency. Corporations get complacent with the status quo, and then the market moves on and leaves them in its dust. Kodak use to dominate the field of photography. Then digital cameras came along and Kodak had to file for bankruptcy. It was too comfortable with film photography; too complacent with the status quo. Kodak is still around, but it had to reinvent itself in order to survive. The history of the corporate world is filled with many such stories. As is the history of the Church. If you’re not moving on to the next new thing, then you’re dead in the water. The journey continues.

We’re not there yet; *and*, we never were. Where you thought you were never was. Part of what makes us reluctant to move on is nostalgia for the good old days. We’re reluctant to move into the future because part of us wants to recreate the past. Nostalgia is not necessarily a bad thing, but there are 2 kinds of nostalgia: restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia wants to recreate the past; reflective nostalgia wants to *learn* from the past and *build* on the past as we move into the future. The problem with restorative nostalgia is this: the past as we remember it never really was. The so-called good old days had their own problems that we tend to forget. Every time I fly I long for the days when you got dressed-up to fly, and you had leg room and real meals and no long lines at security. I forget about the fact that back then airplanes had a nasty habit of falling from the sky. Flying is much safer now than it was 60 years ago.

We long for the good old days of small town America, forgetting about the gossiping and the back-biting and the way in which your business was everyone else’s business.

We long for the good old days of civility in politics, forgetting that for most of our history politics have been anything but civil. 160 years ago we were *shooting* at each other, for crying out loud! Restorative nostalgia wants to recreate a time that never was. Reflective nostalgia recognizes that there are things that we can *learn* from the past, there are values and principles that we can *distill* from the past. These are the values and principles that can guide us into God’s future. Where you thought you were never was. The journey continues.

We’re not there yet, and where you thought you were never was. But that’s okay because wherever we are, God is; wherever we are, God is with us. This is the wisdom of John 1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God…and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:1,14). This is the comfort of Matthew 28: Jesus says, “Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt. 28:20). This is the hope of Romans 8: nothing in all Creation, not even death, can separate us from the love of God, in Jesus Christ our Lord (see Rom. 8:35-39).

Wherever we are, God is. Longing for the past even as we press on toward the future, God is with us. Looking for the Promise Land while resisting the temptation to say, “This *is* the Promise Land,” God is with us. The Word is living among us, wherever we are.

In fact, the John passage really resolves the whole dispute about whether or not we’ve arrived, whether we should be comfortable with the status quo or push on to a higher goal. Scripture frames that debate in terms of whether or not the King should build a Temple. The prophetic tradition says, “No, we don’t need a Temple because we have the tabernacle.” And what does the Gospel say? Again, John 1:14: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Except in Greek, it says, “The Word became flesh and *tabernacled* among us; the Word became flesh and *pitched his tent* among us.” John lifts-up the centerpiece of the prophetic tradition and it turns out to be Jesus! God is with us always in Jesus Christ: even as Jesus points the way to the future; even as Jesus calls us into the future; even as Jesus says, “Follow me!”

It’s human nature to long for stability. We’re not comfortable with change, and we never will be. None of us are. That’s a real challenge, when the One whom we seek to follow is so often on the move. That’s a real challenge, when the very Presence who promises to be with us doesn’t stay in one place for too long.

But when we dare to follow him, amazing things can happen. Just ask the children at Bloomington-First Christian Church, whose faith flourished and whose love for the Church blossomed when they started the Children Worship and Wonder program 5 years ago. That’s the same program that we will be implementing here in the coming months, as the journey continues.

When we dare to follow Jesus, amazing things can happen. Just ask anyone who’s been out at Camp, as we continue to make repairs and clean-up the grounds and get the place ready for a bunch of new people who will be touched by the Presence of God in that sacred space, as the journey continues.

When we dare to follow Jesus, amazing things can happen. Just ask our guests at the Men’s Warming Center, especially those who found their way from the street, through the shelter, to a job and a home of their own last winter, as the journey continues.

These are the things that can happen when the Church says, “No, we haven’t arrived. Yes, we’ve come a long way, but Jesus is calling us to go still further.”

The journey continues. The Holy One abides not in a stately temple but a mobile tent. The journey continues. And one who would keep up with God’s Word better not get too comfortable because His truth is marching on. The journey continues. The Kingdom in its fullness remains somewhere over the horizon, and that’s where we, as a community of faith, aim to go. As Captain Kirk might say, “Mr. Sulu, take us out!”