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How to March on the Capitol  
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Life is a journey, they say. But, this journey with Jesus isn't a vacation. In the gospel of Luke, the road leads to Jerusalem. This journey is more of a march. The word "march" has in it the name of the god of war, Mars. This march is moving toward a face-off. Or, more to the point, Jesus sets his face to Jerusalem. He walks with determination toward his destiny.

Today is a pivotal point in Luke's gospel. It begins the second movement in the gospel of Luke. The gospel of Luke can be seen in three major movements. The first movement is Galilee; the second is the march to Jerusalem; the third is Jerusalem itself. The second movement takes up ten chapters, Chapter 9 to 19 and we start that today. We march with Jesus on the road. We'll be walking this way through almost all of ordinary time—till about Advent.

So what shall we pack for this march? Shall we pack heat? Even as the march is inchoate, James and John want to zap the Samaritans who reject them hospitable passage. Surprisingly, Jesus begins his journey to Jerusalem by trying to pass through Samaria. Why, when Jews in his day did everything they could to avoid Samaria? Jews who passed through Samaria invited bloody conflict. They would walk the long way around to the Jordan River to get from Galilee to Jerusalem. Jews hated Samaritans and Samaritans returned the favor.

The story of their mutual hatred was old, even by Jesus' time. According to the Samaritans, they were descendants of the Israelites who crossed into Canaan. Following Moses' commandment, they had established their tabernacle on Mt. Gerizim in Bethel.

The Jews, however, considered the Samaritans foreigners, brought into the land of Samaria by the Assyrians when they conquered Israel in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. According to the Jewish perspective, after destroying the northern nation of Israel, the Assyrians sent the Samaritans to settle in Israel to defile their pure religion with a mixture of Assyrian and Jewish practices. Therefore, the Jews refused to allow the Samaritans to participate in worship at Jerusalem. Denied access to Jerusalem, the Samaritans built their own temple on Mount Gerizim. In the second century BCE, the Jews razed the Samaritan temple to the ground.

For centuries the bitterness ran deep. So, when Jesus started his journey first to Samaria, James and John asked Jesus with all sincerity, “Do you want us to blow them up?” Why else would Jesus go there if not to pick a fight?

We hear from Luke that Jesus went there and was rejected by the Samaritans because his face was set toward Jerusalem. We also hear that Jesus did not want to blow up the Samaritans. In fact, he used the occasion of rejection to rebuke the disciples for their violent impulse. And then, he moved along.

I think Jesus started in Samaria because he wanted to show them what he had in mind for his march. He was going to the capitol and so those around him expected him to take power. The long for king who would depose the Romans has come, some might have thought. A warrior king who would take over by force. But, this was not the kind of king Jesus intended to be. He wanted to begin how he would end—not with violence, but to expose our addiction to violence and power. His march was an epic of rejection that ultimately meant suffering, rejection, betrayal in Jerusalem.

So, no James and John, this march was not to storm the capitol and take it by force. It was a march that was the antithesis of the god of war. It was to lay down his life in the midst of violence to expose sinners to their sins—and to offer a choice for repentance and redemption. It was to offer them freedom from the slavery of sin. This was the love of God—to do such a hard thing, to suffer and to die so that humanity could choose to reject the paths of destruction.

This was a hard road. In fact, the word “road” here also means “path” or “way”, which was what the earliest Christians called themselves: the followers of the way. The road was a metaphor for discipleship. Such a path to walk was in no-ways

easy. Jesus made no bones about the difficulty involved in discipleship. We hear this described by three encounters for those who thought they might tag along.

*As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*

These conversations show that discipleship has its costs. It has its nourishment, too. Otherwise, how could we bear it? The nourishment is hope and freedom. We are disciples of this hope and freedom. I know this week has been hard for many of us who seek after the freedom of the most vulnerable and marginalized. It is tempting to quit when so much seems against the work. And yet, out of faithful discipleship, we must continue our work for freedom and hope; we hold these things dearer than our tiredness and the temptation to quit. We follow Jesus. We walk the road. We march.