

“Travel Itinerary”

John 14:25-29

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In one of my previous pastorates, I announced that I was going to preach a series of sermons on death and dying. I was teaching a brief course on this subject at a local Baptist Student Union on a nearby college campus and thought it would be beneficial to my congregation.

After making the announcement, a member walked up to me and said, “With all due respect, I’ll not be in church the next two or three weeks. This is not a comfortable subject for me.” I certainly appreciated his candor, but was taken back by it. I suppose so much of my work deals with the reality of death that I never thought others would be uncomfortable discussing it.

It appears the disciples were uncomfortable hearing Jesus talk about death, especially his own. He continued, however, to discuss it with them in what is known as the Farewell Discourses. In particular, John 14:28-29 caught my attention.

“You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs so that when it does occur, you may believe.”

“And now I have told you before this occurs,” speaks volumes to me. Jesus was preparing his disciples for an event in his life that would have a profound impact upon them, his death. **Why did he do it?**

He saw his death on the horizon. The hour was drawing near. He had gone to observe Passover with the disciples in Jerusalem and knew in his heart that he would not live through the week. In all likelihood, his enemies would prevail and crucify him.

He could not feel this deep in his heart and keep it from them, not just because he needed support, but because he cared deeply about those that would be affected by his death. Compassion compelled him to warn the disciples of what was coming. Necessity did, too.

The work he had begun needed to continue after his death and he was depending upon them to do it. For three years he taught and trained them. They had to go on and not abandon the mission.

How did he prepare them? In this text, it appears that he talked to them about **death as a normal or natural part of life**. He used very familiar words like “going away and coming again.” Even he had to die and leave them. He did not appear to be shocked or alarmed by this.

In a recent Mother’s Day article by pastor, author and columnist Tom Ehrich titled “Going Away,” he writes about the things he learned from his mother. “My mother taught me many things, from the joy of writing and reading to the importance of making a difference in the world to the virtues of kindness and gentleness. Most recently, she taught me about dying. She allowed death to come. She fought illness for a time, but not death. Her meaning was clear: ‘I am going away and it is good, not frightening.’ Death wasn’t an enemy or an escape. Death was the next thing to happen.”

For Jesus, death was the next thing to happen in his life, too. It is not that he wanted to die, but it was the price he would pay in order to be faithful to God in a world where others did not honor Him. “Father, let this cup pass from me,” Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, “nevertheless, not my will be done but yours.”

Secondly, Jesus told them where he was going, to the Father. He talked about death with a sense of hope and anticipation. He did not see death as the end of life, but the continuation of life in the presence of a loving parent. I sense no fear on his part as he talked about what would happen after death. As a matter of fact, just the opposite was true. “You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me you would **rejoice** that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I.” This had to encourage them and help them deal with their own anxiety.

Finally, Jesus told them that they would not be alone even after he was gone. God would provide the Spirit of truth to be with them forever.

“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” John 14:25-27.

Jesus knew the disciples were experiencing separation anxiety. In a very short time, their world was going to collapse in chaos around them. No doubt they were wondering how they could possibly continue the work they began without his presence and leadership. The challenge was overwhelming. He assured them that God was aware of their feelings and needs and was prepared to help them through the gift of His eternal Spirit that would reside with them forever, providing encouragement, comfort, guidance, wisdom, power and peace.

I like what Jesus models about relationships. While our text revolves around the concept of death, it also focuses upon life. It reminds us that life is a journey that we share with others. From Jesus we learn today that we need to share with others on our journey what we see on the horizon, where we think we are headed, how we feel about it and what impact it will have upon them. This is what loving, responsible parents, children, siblings and friends do.

Who around you needs to know where you are on your journey and how you feel about it? What do you need to do to prepare them for the changes coming to them and you? Think about it this week and ask the Lord to guide you through this process. He has plenty of experience, you know.