

“Oh, the places Jesus goes”

Luke 4:1-13

Wayne Eberly

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Sometimes upon graduation a young person will receive as a gift a Dr. Seuss book with the wonderful title, “Oh, the places you’ll go!” From the first words you realize this is a book about the great adventure called life. A young person about to step into the future is greeted with this marvelous invitation.

***Congratulations! Today is your day.***

***You’re off to great places! You’re off and away!***

There are promises of soaring success...

***You’ll be on your way up! You’ll be seeing great sights!***

***You’ll join the high fliers who soar to great heights!***

There is also the recognition that not all of life will be victory and triumph...

***I’m sorry to say so but, sadly, it’s true***

***That bang-ups and hang-ups can happen to you.***

***You can get all hung up in a prickly perch.***

***And your gang will fly on. You’ll be left in the lurch.***

***You’ll come down from the lurch with an unpleasant bump.***

***And the chances are, then, that you’ll be in a slump.***

***And when you’re in a slump, you’re not in for much fun.***

***Un-slumping yourself is not easily done.***

But there is one thing Dr. Seuss is not, and that is a pessimist.

***NO! That’s not for you! Somehow you’ll escape all that waiting and staying.***

***You’ll find the bright places where Boom Bands are playing.***

Oh, the good doctor wants to share with all who embark life’s great adventure that there will be bumps and slumps and times of sadness, sorrow, and deep loneliness, but the book ends with the hope that the lives we live might even move mountains.

***So...be your name Buxbaum or Bixby or Bray***

***Or Mordecai Ali Van Allen O'Shea,  
You're off to great places! Today is your day!  
Your mountain is waiting. So...get on your way!***

In the mind of Dr. Suess there is absolutely no limit to the places you may go. The book is such a trumpet call to boldly go and do and be all that you can be, I began to wonder what would have happened if...if unlike the traditional version of the visit of the Magi, those three Kings from the Orient, what if...instead of three there were four Wise Men from the east? And what if...what if the fourth wise man was none other than Theodor S. Geisel, more popularly known as Dr. Suess. And while the traditional gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh would still be delivered to the baby child, what if Dr. Suess was there to place in the infant Christ's hands a copy of the book I hold before you, a copy of "Oh, the places you will go."

I'm being playful, but imagine a book like that, in the hands of the Son of God, that baby infant lying in the manger. The angels have already declared he will be called the Son of the Most High God, that he will sit on the throne of his father David, that he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and that his kingdom will never end. As Shepherds and Wise Men lean in to look at the blessed holy child, can you even imagine the hopes and fears gathered in that simple little stable? Oh, as the Christ child grows up, the places he will go. The possibilities are limitless. He is the Son of God. With God, all things are possible.

Today is the first Sunday in Lent. Today, we take a look at one of the first places Jesus goes. Remember, all doors are open, all paths are possible, all dreams are achievable, and all glory is within his grasp. Today as we begin the journey of Lent with our Lord Jesus, the expectations are so exciting. When Jesus takes the first steps of his journey in Luke 4, he is still shaking off the water from his baptism in the Jordan River. The heavenly voice is still ringing in his ears. "You are my Son, whom I love. With you I am well pleased." When Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, goes into the desert, it brings to mind images of another journey in the desert, another journey in the wilderness. Add in the number forty, that time it was forty years in the wilderness for Israel, this time it is forty days in the wilderness for Jesus, and

the stage is set for Jesus to go to town as the Deliverer, the Redeemer, the one who rescues the people of God.

Exodus had the plagues and the Passover, the Red Sea, the manna, the Ten Commandments, and much, much, more. As Jesus goes into the desert, the stage is set for chapter one in “Oh, the places he will go.” Apparently, the devil was a fan of Dr. Suess. The devil knew Jesus was the Son of God, and so he wanted to test Jesus to see what Jesus was made of. We know how the devil operates. The devil flaunts his power. The devil glories in his power. The devil uses his power for his own benefit and for his own blessing. Knowing that Jesus also has power, the power of the Son of God, the devil tries to decide for Jesus where Jesus should go.

When Jesus sees stones, the devil says Jesus should show his power and turn those stones to bread.

When Jesus sees all the kingdoms of the world, the devil says Jesus should grab hold of those kingdoms and enjoy all the splendor and authority.

When Jesus is lifted up to the highest point of Jerusalem’s temple, the devil says Jesus should choose what is spectacular and death defying, throwing himself down so the angels can rush to his rescue.

That is how the devil thinks Jesus should do things. If the devil was in charge of the places Jesus would go, there would be a lot of frivolous miracles and fancy mansions and flying leaps from tall buildings. That’s where the devil thinks Jesus should go.

Beginning with the temptation in the desert, we are presented with powerful images that clearly show in no uncertain terms the places Jesus chose to go. These first thirteen verses in Luke chapter four clearly demonstrate that Jesus is not going to let the devil tell him where he should go and what he should do. In these first thirteen verses in Luke chapter four Jesus basically tells the devil where he is not going to go. Each time the devil tempts him Jesus says no. No! No! No! I’m not going there.

And then what follows after the thirteenth verse in the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Luke is a glorious description of the places Jesus does go. Knowing that literally all things were possible for Jesus, that Jesus could have

gone anywhere and done anything, what he chooses to do and where he chooses to go are both dramatically different from what we might expect, and an absolutely amazing affirmation that Jesus really was the Son of God. Instead of glory and power and thrones and kingdoms and showing off with stones and bread, Jesus goes where people are hurting and hearts are breaking. Jesus goes where sin is ruining lives and fear is crushing the hopes of people. Instead of being disappointed by the places Jesus chooses to go, people like you and me gather on this first Sunday of Lent and put on our walking shoes because we want to go where Jesus goes.

- We want to go to the seashore and hear him call, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.
- We want to go to the synagogue and hear him say, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor and freedom for the captive and recovery of sight for the blind and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” And we want to hear him say, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”
- We want to go with Jesus to the leper and watch as his words and his touch bring healing and wholeness.
- We want to go with Jesus to the tax booth where he calls Levi to new life, to a new life where all those who have been labeled as sinners can come and celebrate because Jesus goes to seek and to save the lost.
- We want to go with Jesus to the lame, the blind, the deaf...to the woman who washes his feet with her tears, who anoints his feet with ointment, and who wipes his feet clean with her hair...to places where demons who had robbed life are cast out and troubled souls are set free.
- We want to go with Jesus on the turbulent waters, reveling and rejoicing his power to calm the waves and quiet the storm.
- We want to go with Jesus and stand in line with 5,000 people as Jesus multiplies the loaves and fishes and feeds the multitude, leaving behind heaping mounds of leftovers.
- We want to go with Jesus and sit by his side as he tells his stories about mustard seeds and sowers, his stories about a man who is beaten up and left to die by the side of the road, his stories about a shepherd who leaves 99 sheep in the fold to find the one who is lost and a woman who searches desperately until she finds one lone coin. We want to go with Jesus and sit by his side as

he tells a story about a Father who waits...longing for a wayward child to return home.

- We want to go with Jesus when he climbs a tree and tells Zacchaeus to come on down, I'm going to your house.

Jesus goes to all these places. As we enter the Season of Lent, we want to go with him. Even when Jesus sets his face to Jerusalem, we want to go with him. Even when Jesus prays his prayer in the garden, we want to go with him. Even when Jesus is arrested, we want to go with him. Even when Jesus is mocked and beaten and tried and condemned, we want to go with him. Even when his hands are pierced and a crown of thorns crushes his head, we want to go with him. And yes, even when he is nailed to the cross, we want to go with him. We want to go with Jesus because...we believe he is the Son of God.

Each one of the choices Jesus makes might look like a mistake. Why does he go there? Why does he go there? Shouldn't he go to a castle and sit on a throne and dress in the finest robe and make decrees and command armies?

There are many people who will never understand why Jesus goes to the places he goes. But if we go with him, we have the opportunity not only to understand why Jesus goes to the places he goes, we have the opportunity to experience the wonderful blessing that comes to those who by faith understand why Jesus goes where he goes and why Jesus does what he does. We have the opportunity to experience the healing and wholeness that comes from knowing Jesus went to the cross to conquer sin and death. We have the opportunity to experience the healing and wholeness that comes from knowing Jesus was raised to life so all who put their faith and trust in him might have life...now...and life for all eternity. As we go where Jesus goes, let us go as humble followers, humble followers who trust that Jesus knows exactly what he is doing. And because Jesus does what he does and because Jesus goes where he goes, he has won a victory for humanity that can never be taken away. This Season of Lent may we go where Jesus goes, and may we give him all the glory and honor and praise every step of the way...every step of that long journey to the cross. "Oh, the places Jesus goes for you and for me and for all his lost children."

*Oh the places we'll go.*

*Levi and lepers and lame men galore,  
when you follow Jesus you never know what's in store.*

*Walking the street and washing of feet,  
the lost you will find and the lonely you'll meet.*

*Some with laughter, some with tears,  
some with hopes, some with fears,  
Some with questions, some with doubts,  
patiently and with kindness you'll hear each one out.*

*Your shoulder will be cried on, your ear will be bent,  
but whether in weeping or rejoicing,  
it is always in his name that you are sent.*

*And on dark days when sadness and sorrow tear real lives apart,  
and hearts break wide open and tears like floodgates they start,  
know that our Lord is experienced with gloom,  
for once he wept at his dear friend's tomb.*

*And on those days when barren trees bloom  
we will shout for joy at our coming bridegroom,  
when death says good bye and quietly exits the scene,  
and all the world breaks forth in new creation and everything is green,  
then don't miss your chance to tell the good news,  
of the Lord who has won the battle, a battle he will never lose,  
and so point to the once barren tree in its bloom,  
and share the good news, Jesus is risen from the tomb.*

*It's a story so marvelous it is sure to take away your breath,  
for it is the story of how life conquers death.*

*And now he sends us with the news that is good.*

*He sends us to every town, every village and every neighborhood,  
he sends us with kindness and mercy and love,  
he sends us with power and His Spirit from above.*

*And whether we move mountains or simply plant trees,  
I'm sure that every day will find us on our knees.*

*For it is on our knees that we worship and our knees that we pray,  
and on our knees we will serve him, so on our knees we will stay.*

*On our knees we will stay,  
offering our praise to the one who is perfect in each and every way.*