



## Message for the Fifth Sunday in Lent

### “Final Steps”

Welcome again Blessed Ones. As always, it is an honor and blessing to have the privilege of this pulpit. I am grateful to be your priest and to share in this most excellent of worship communities.

Saints, we have walked the Lenten Journey Home together and we are almost there. For the last weeks we have learned about ourselves and how we fit as members of the Jesus Movement into our own selves, our families, our community and our world. This journey homeward is coming to a close, for us and for Jesus. We are in the Final Steps of our Journey and our Vision, and we are in the final steps of Jesus' Journey and Jesus' Vision. We are collectively coming to the time of trial. We can begin to see the hint of the finish line before us. The faintest of outlines. But it has been a long walk. Sometimes joyful, sometimes bruising. We have come face-to-face with who we were; who we are; and who we can become. And the reality and challenge of this discovery is a lot to bear, a lot to process and a lot to carry. Our Walk Home to self, family, community, the world and our God, mirroring and paralleling Jesus Walk Home to the conclusion of His Vision and to His God. And so, today's message on the Fifth Sunday of Lent is entitled, “Final Steps.”

It is hard to speak truthfully about the last days of Lent without acknowledging the darkness and foreboding of these last days of the Journey Home. These “Final Steps” will not be easy. Are these some “pockets” of great joy in these final steps. Yes, certainly...Palm Sunday's triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the intimacy, life lessons and sacred gifts of Maundy Thursday. But these final weeks are about finding resilience, remembering our purpose and being renewed and inspired by our Vision...and staying true to it, as our world begins to unravel and spin out of control around us. These final weeks of Lent are a gut-check; about hanging in;

about simply putting one foot in front of the other as we take our Final Steps home. Determination...finding inner strength. For Jesus, and for us as well, it is a time of speaking truth plainly, setting things right, recognizing what is important and what is not. Stripping life down to it's lowest common denominator, the irreducible minimum, the indivisible prime numbers as the time of His Crossing approaches.

One cannot speak about Holy Week and Lent's conclusion without a conversation around death and dying...about death and Resurrection. Death is the "elephant in the room" that we love to ignore, talk around and pretend that it has somehow irrelevant to the Easter Story. But in these concluding weeks Death surrounds us, wraps us and, yes Saints, has a lot to teach us.

Our dominant society has a terrible struggle with coming to grips with death. Society's linear thinking uses a model of life with a distinct beginning, middle and end. We mourn life's end, we speak of our dead relatives in the past tense and speak about who they were and what they did. The typical societal obituary reads more like a resume, listing a loved one's jobs, relationships, and success. Past tense, over/done. Indigenous communities see life and death differently. Circular...continuous...eternal, one flowing seamlessly and gracefully into the other. Two parts of the same whole. Not life and death, but just life lived differently. Physical and Spiritual...body soul and spirit...simply transitioning from world to world seamlessly and beautifully. Death not an end of anything, but simply a transition into a different way of being, existing. Sound familiar? Yes indeed, the Indigenous view of life and Jesus' and the Christian view of life parallel each other perfectly. Congruent and consistent. We are born again from the physical world to the spirit world on the day of our crossing, the day of our death, what the Indigenous Elders call our Traveling Day. Where life continues with our ancestors, our relatives and our God. Face to face, spirit to spirit. Everywhere at the same moment in time, seeing all, knowing and being one again with the Universe that birthed us. As we said at the beginning of Lent, "We are stardust, we are golden, and we've got to get ourselves back to the garden." The garden of oneness with our Creator...our great reunion...our resurrection.

It is time for some straight talk about death, Saints. Ah, I can hear computers clicking off all over SW Washington and beyond. Death is just something that, even as Christians, we put into our "too hard basket"; something we will deal with later, when it smacks us hard in a car wreck, or a hospice bed. Death should not be a surprise Saints. Death is one of the most common events on the planet, with

about 175,000 people dying on any given day. And any day could be our “Traveling Day,” Saints.

I believe that Jesus knew full well where his Vision would take him. How his radical and life-giving view of the world would ultimately end in his death. Jesus even had some second thoughts about his Vision his destiny...questioned it...in the Garden of Gethsemane. “Father if this burden can possibly pass from me...” Literally sweating blood with anxiety, Jesus wondered if he had the courage and determination to take the “Final Steps.” But Jesus was committed to his Movement, and how it would change the world, and so he used his final days, doing what needed to be done, saying clearly what needed to be said and living the truth of his Vision as he walked, stumbled and ultimately crawled home to His God.

Blessed Ones, Jesus embraced his life and death as equals. Jesus calling, his ministry, his servanthood, his Vision. Jesus total dedication to what we call The Jesus Movement, that radical view of the world, where love is the only currency that matters.

Jesus faces his death with honor, strength, and a quietness of spirit that is inspiring to us all. The Lakota were convinced that Jesus was a Lakota, living his life with courage, dignity and honor and facing his death the same way. Having been true to his Vision Quest and honorably completing his work, he was ready for Death. We have the same opportunity.

Know that our Traveling Day is imminent...today, tomorrow perhaps more, we do not know. Like Jesus, embrace your Vision each day with dedication and honor so that when you're Traveling Day arrives you will be ready. Like Jesus, say what needs to be said, do what needs to be done today. Each day that you rise is yet another opportunity to fulfill the promises you made when you said “Yes” to The Jesus Way Movement on the day of your Baptism. To recognize the dignity of every human being and to love one another as Jesus loved us.

For me, the essence of Holy Week and the example Jesus last days are summed up not by any great Christian theologian but by Tecumseh, the great Indigenous leader of the Shawnee Nation. Here is his wisdom:

***“So, live your life that the fear of death can never enter your heart. Trouble no one about their religion; respect others in their view, and demand that they respect yours. Love your life, perfect your life, beautify all things in your life.*”**

*Seek to make your life long and its purpose in the service of your people. Prepare a noble death song for the day when you go over the Great Divide. Always give a word or a sign of salute when meeting or passing a friend, even a stranger, when in a lonely place. Show respect to all people and grovel to none. When you arise in the morning, give thanks for the food and for the joy of living. If you see no reason for giving thanks, the fault lies only with yourself. Abuse no one and no thing, for abuse turns the wise ones into fools and robs the spirit of its vision. When it comes time to die, be not like those whose hearts are filled with the fear of death, so that when their time comes, they weep and pray for a little more time to live their lives over in a different way. Sing your Death Song and die like a hero going home.”*

Our final steps home are before us.