



*The Ultimate Climbing Partner*

*John 11:1-45*

Fifth Sunday in Lent, April 2nd, 2017

First Federated Church, Peoria, Illinois

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The Grand Teton is a big mountain. When visitors come to see it, usually they only see the east side, just one face of the mountain. But it's so much more than that! :) However, I won't spend too much time describing one of my favorite parts of creation.

I lived in Jackson, Wyoming for four years, and felt the pull of the mountains, they were compelling. Every time I looked at the Grand Teton I wanted to scale its granite walls. To climb the well established routes first ascended by Glenn Exum and Paul Petzl. To cling to its icy overhangs and repel off its ledges. I was drawn to it by its magnetism. Captured by it.

Our passage from John is similar in one way to the Grand Teton. It is a compelling passage, pulling us to think about all the possible routes to be explored. A life time could be devoted to searching this word and still new things will be revealed each time the passage is read. This morning, instead of taking on the entire passage, we will be focusing our attention on one part, just like a climber does when they pick one route to follow to the top. Our focus will be on verses seven through ten, you can think of it as one of the eastern views of passage. :)

In verse seven, Jesus, speaking to the disciples says "Let's go to Judea." As it happens Jesus and the disciples were just in Judea. They were there during the Festival of Dedication often called Hanukkah. The festival was a celebration of the dedication of the temple. So this festival was to set apart and to remember that God dwells among God's people, for the temple was the place where the physical presence of God resided. While there, Jesus was approached by a group of Judeans. Immediately, they start in on him. Mocking him about who he claimed to be. They asked him plainly "Are you the Messiah?" Jesus answered their question, but as he often did, he didn't answer with a simple yes or no. It was complex, fuller, and more accurate. Although his response was true, it stirred the mob into a frenzy. People picked up stones and got ready to throw them at Jesus. So he told the mob he had done many good deeds and asked "For which one are you going to stone me?" The mob didn't care about the miracles he performed. They were infuriated over who Jesus claimed to be, "The Son of God" which, to them, was blasphemy and a

crime worthy of capital punishment. Somehow (I can only think by the work of the Spirit) Jesus and the disciples escaped without anyone throwing stones. When they left they did so under the threat of death. Putting it mildly, Judea wasn't a friendly place to them.

If a mob threatened to stone us when we stopped in for a visit, we probably would not think it was a good idea to return less than a week later, but that did not deter Jesus. He also asked the disciples to join him, to journey with him - even in the face of danger. Naturally, the disciples questioned Jesus about that decision, for to them it seemed illogical and unreasonable. They objected to going back and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, only a few days ago the people in Judea were trying to stone you. Are you going there again?" The disciples had been there with him when the Judeans had gathered stones to kill him. They didn't want to go back there, and logically so, but Jesus pressed on and the disciples followed him even though that meant passing through danger yet again.

In response to the disciples objections Jesus went on to say in verse nine, "There are twelve hours of daylight every day. During the day people can walk safely." Jesus is telling the disciples, hey, you have the light of the world, you can walk in safety. There is little more precious natural resource to a climber than daylight. Daylight is safety. Daylight is security. Daylight is protection. During the day they can climb in relative safety.

Jesus continued on to say in verse 10 "But at night there is danger of stumbling because they have no light." Without light climbers are at risk. In darkness you cannot avoid falling rocks, improperly tied knots, and avalanches because you can't see! In darkness temperatures plummet and hypothermia, frostbite, and death are only one small mistake away. In darkness the route to the summit is obscured, the way can be easily lost, and partners can suddenly go missing. Darkness is no friend of any climber for in it stumbling is an ever present reality. The dangers of darkness are the reasons why climbers make their summit bid during daylight.

Here inlays the trouble for the disciples, if they follow Jesus as he has asked them to then they must go back to a place where people were ready to harm them. In doing so, they are journeying with Jesus into and through dangerous places, walking in the darkness of night.

These verses tell a great truth about being a disciple of Jesus. Following him can mean there will be times when his disciples will walk with him through harm's way. As the Gospel of John tells us that is exactly what the disciples did. They traveled with Jesus a second time to Judea, a place of peril.

The dangers of following Jesus have not changed since the days of the disciples. We, Christ followers, journey with him into places of risk. Yes, I acknowledge that there isn't an angry mob wanting outside of the sanctuary with stones. To some degree this is a safe place for us, but it isn't all that safe for everyone in Peoria...The fact that Peoria has been named the worst city in the nation for black Americans by 24/7 Wall St. is a testament to that reality. Danger abounds and we as Christ followers cannot turn a blind eye to the injustices of this world. No, we have been called by Christ to move into those places of danger and call attention to injustice. We are to travel through the dark places of this world, with the good and sure news Jesus is the light of the world. If you follow him, you won't stumble in darkness, because in him you have the light that leads to life (John 8:12).

To do so might seem like scaling a mountain because of the darkness in this world, but we aren't walking alone. Jesus journeys with his followers everywhere they go, but he did not avoid Judea, Jesus led his disciples into uncomfortable places, but he points out truth- we have the light of the world. In fact, his word is a lamp for our feet and a light unto the path he has laid before us. We are assured of this truth each and every time we come to the Lord's Table. The Lord's Table is a celebration and proclamation of Jesus' real, spiritual presence with us, of the forgiveness offered to us through Christ's work on the cross, and the ongoing spiritual nourishment he provides us. It is also a celebration of the unity of Christ's body, the church, as well as a meal of hope, of anticipating the heavenly feast of Christ's coming kingdom.

Jesus journeys with us and shines the light that leads to life. That does not mean that God will not lead us to places that are uncomfortable or even dangerous, but we know that Christ climbs with us. Christ with us, Christ before us, Christ behind us, Christ in us. Our God is with us every step of the way.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.