

“The Easy Way”
Mark 9:2-10
Transfiguration Sunday
February 11, 2018
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For the last thousand years or so, Christian pilgrims have traveled across northern Spain to the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, the cathedral of St. James. Ever since the late 10th century European believers have traveled there to visit the place where tradition has it that St. James, brother of John, sons of Zebedee, one of the first disciples of Jesus is buried. The route across Spain is called the Camino de Santiago, the road of St. James. It's a series of pathways and roads that start in France and travel through the towns of Northern Spain, through Pamplona and Burgos and Leon and eventually all the way to Santiago, a distance of about 500 miles. Last year the Camino was traveled by over 300,000 pilgrims from all over the world. At the end is the medieval cathedral of St. James, where pilgrims will kiss the feet of a statue of St. James at the entrance, and then take the steps behind the altar that go behind another statue of James and traditionally the devout will hug St. James before visiting the crypt below the altar where a silver box holds the bones of the apostle.

I've always wanted to travel along the Camino, to see the towns along the way, to visit the cathedral, to hug St. James. But it takes several months to walk the Camino even if one walks 10-15 miles every day. And you have to have a backpack that can carry all your changes of clothes, your food, your sleeping bag, and everything else you need. And you have to stay in dormitory-like hostels along the way, and although they are cheap, only about 10-15 dollars a night, you're in a room with lots and lots of other people. Then when Erin and I visited Spain a few years ago, we made an interesting discovery. You can drive it! Lots of the Camino is alongside modern roads and so if you have a car you can just drive along the Camino, passing all these walkers with their backpacks walking in the rain. And that's what we did. We drove through northern Spain in 2 days, not 40, and we arrived in Santiago, got settled into our hotel and then the next morning we went to the cathedral for the Pilgrim's Mass. This is when all the people who have been traveling on the Camino worship together and their places of origin

are mentioned by the priest during the service. We went in and there were a fair number of people with their backpacks, exhausted, dirty, sore and relieved that they had reached the goal of their pilgrimage. And as they looked up to the altar of St. James there were eyes that filled with tears and one could see that their lives were changed by all they had gone through on their pilgrimage. We sat through the mass and visited the crypt and even hugged the statue of St. James, but did it mean as much to us? Did it mean as much to me as it would have if I had walked it? The way had been hard for them. I had taken the easy way.

Peter wants the easy way. I can relate to him. I bet a lot of you can also. A few days before this episode on the mountain, Jesus had told the disciples that he was heading for Jerusalem where he would be arrested, tried and killed. The disciples, especially Peter, have a hard time getting their heads around that idea, that this special guy, who can do miracles, who teaches the word of God, who comes from God, could be killed by his own people. So six days later when Jesus goes up on the mountain with Peter, James and John, they see him transfigured, they see his holiness, they see him greater than Moses and Elijah. After they go back into heaven, that's when Peter wants to take the easy way. Jesus, let's stay up here. Let's build three little temples, three booths, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. People will come up the mountain to us, we'll never have to go back down! It will be easy.

Leanne Pearce Reed says: "Perhaps that is what the disciples wanted when Peter offered to build tents and stay up on that mountain. The disciples caught a glimpse of Christ's glory, a preview of the fullness to come, and perhaps all they wanted was to take the shorter route, just go ahead, and get to that glorious ending an easier way." Often that's what I want to do. I want the results, but I don't want to have to walk the journey to get there. This Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, the beginning of our journey to Easter. We will put ashes on our foreheads to remind us that we are mortal, that we will all die someday. And I bet there will be more people here on Easter Sunday than will be here Wednesday at 7:00. We want the celebration of Easter, but we don't really want the reminder of Ash Wednesday or the suffering of Good Friday. But we don't really have a choice. It turns out that

there is no easier way to get there. Not for Jesus, not for his disciples, not for those who follow him today. The life of faith means taking the longer route—the often arduous journey, full of grueling climbs and treacherous valleys and sometimes stunning vistas. Along the way, there are times when we would give anything for a shorter route, an easier way, to be able to take the bus around the weariness of grief, or the radiation treatments, or the couples counseling, or the 12-step meetings, or the unemployment line. We wish we could skip to the glorious ending.¹ Jesus didn't go back up to heaven with Moses and Elijah. He went back down the mountain, to Jerusalem, to the agony in the garden, to betrayal, to suffering, to the cross. Because he knew that's where we were and he came to stand with us, to stand there instead of us.

¹ Reed, Leanne Pierce, *Feasting on the Gospels: Mark*. p.259.