

There is something fascinating about watching an infant learn to walk. At first it is so difficult for them to get their balance, and they pull themselves up using the furniture or whatever is handy. Pretty soon, though, they are stutter-stepping along into the hands of their mommy or daddy. We've all seen this picture of a parent encouraging their child to come to them. The child learns that the trip is worth the effort and hardship. In a similar way, seeing a child learn to swim by struggling through the water to someone who loves them illustrates the benefits of a difficult journey which brings loved ones together. We go to those with whom we feel fellowship.

Such a journey is especially difficult if death is involved, as when we go to visit the terminally ill or the bereaved. There are several scriptures that are interesting to consider along this line. The first has to do with Jacob, who for so many years thought that his son Joseph was dead. When he finally learned that he was alive in Egypt, he rejoiced and said, *"I'm convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die."* (Genesis 45:28). In a way, Joseph was resurrected in the mind of Jacob, who had grieved so terribly for so much of his life. He was willing, even in the frailty of his old age, to cross the wide famine-ridden desert to see him one more time.

Another passage deals with David and the loss of the first son by his wife Bathsheba. He knows that he has sinned with her, and he is reaping the harvest of his sin. He knows that to go to him is possible, but only through the difficult path of death. When he learns that his son is dead, he says, *"But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me."* (2 Samuel 12:23) I sense that David has a desire to be with this son, even though he could not have really known him during his short life on this earth.

Then Jesus, in considering the death of his intimate friend Lazarus, seeks to go to him and have fellowship. Lazarus is dead, but it is not a permanent condition. Jesus says, *"... for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."* (John 11:15) Lazarus was indeed dead, but through the power of Christ he was soon to be resurrected.

These scriptures prepare us to some extent for the journey that each one of us must take:

*The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. **Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.***  
Hebrews 13:11-13

Under the old law, the blood of the sacrifice was offered in the place most intimately connected to God, but the unused carcass was disposed of without any apparent ceremony outside the gate of the city. Perhaps it was burned to eliminate the risk of contamination. What a dishonorable end, though, to the instrument of the people's salvation!

Christ's body met such an end as well, but in this case it was also a beginning. Christ came to us, in a reversal of death: an incarnation. It was a difficult and mostly unpleasant journey that he accomplished without falling to sin even once. He came to fellowship man, and through that fellowship to save him. Christ was our sacrifice, but because He was so much more superior than the priests, he took His blood into the direct presence of God (Hebrews 9:24-25). His body was resurrected rather than burned, and after showing itself in triumph on earth it eventually was taken into heaven.

The idea of going outside the camp to share in the disgrace of our sin is very powerful. I am reminded of Thomas, who though we remember him as the 'doubter', was author of one of the greatest expressions of love for Christ, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." (John 11:16) Thomas was willing to stick to Him no matter what the future held.

We must decide to go to Him with the same attitude, even though the journey may be hard. Communion is all about participation with Christ in His love for God and all mankind. We can erase the disgrace that He suffered by returning His love and sharing His shame. This is parallel to the idea of denying ourselves, taking up our cross and following Him (Luke 9:23).

And then one day we will go to Him in another sense, for He has prepared mansions for us so that we may always be with Him (John 14:2-3). He will welcome us there because we chose to have fellowship with Him for better and worse.

In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

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