

## **Mapping the Sacred: The Path of the Head**

### **Matthew 23:37–39**

I remember the first time I realized that thinking could be holy.

I had always been told that faith meant believing; believing the right things, saying the right words, holding the right doctrines like fragile glass in trembling hands.

Questions were tolerated, but only to a point. Too many questions meant you were drifting. Too much thinking meant you were in danger.

But I was a child who lived in questions.

Questions felt safer than answers. Questions felt honest. Questions felt like truth before it hardened into certainty.

And somewhere along the way I came to believe that my mind — the restless, searching, analytical mind I carried with me everywhere — was a problem to overcome rather than a gift to receive.

I did not yet know there was such a thing as **the Path of the Head**.

In today's Gospel, Jesus stands before Jerusalem and speaks words that sound less like theology and more like grief:

*"Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing."*

There is a tenderness here that surprises me every time.

Not anger first.

Not judgment first.

Grief.

A sorrow born from longing.

A love that has been refused.

And then comes the sentence that has haunted interpreters for centuries:

*"See, your house is left to you, desolate."*

It is easy to hear these words as condemnation.

But I have come to hear them differently.

I hear a teacher who is watching a people close their minds, not out of malice, but out of fear.

I imagine a young student standing at the edge of the crowd that day.

Perhaps he is no older than fifteen. The kind of boy who asks too many questions at synagogue. The kind of boy who lingers after lessons to argue with the rabbi. The kind

of boy who secretly wonders whether truth is bigger than the words written on the scroll.

He hears Jesus speak of gathering and refusal and desolation.

And he does not know what to do with it.

Because he has been taught that certainty is safety.

He has been taught that doubt is danger.

He has been taught that obedience means silence.

Yet something in Jesus' voice sounds like an invitation.

Not an invitation to rebellion.

An invitation to think.

The Path of the Head is not the path of cleverness.

It is not the path of winning arguments.

It is not the path of proving that we are right.

The Path of the Head is the sacred work of seeking truth with humility.

It is the courage to ask real questions.

The patience to live without easy answers.

The discipline to examine what we believe and why we believe it.

The honesty to admit when we are wrong.

And perhaps most difficult of all:

The willingness to learn.

I have known people who abandoned their faith because they believed their minds were not welcome in the sanctuary.

They learned science and were told it threatened God.

They studied history and were told it weakened Scripture.

They discovered complexity and were told faith required simplicity.

And so they left.

Not because they stopped searching for truth.

But because they were told that God was angry with their questions.

I sometimes wonder if Jesus wept over Jerusalem for this very reason.

Not because the people were wicked.

But because they were afraid.

Afraid that new understanding might undo old certainties.

Afraid that learning might disrupt belonging.

Afraid that truth might cost too much.

Fear has a way of closing the mind.

And when the mind closes, something inside us becomes desolate.

I know that desolation.

There have been seasons in my life when the questions cost more than I expected. Times when thinking honestly strained relationships I once trusted.

When asking questions sounded, to others, like disloyalty. When exploring ideas felt less like discovery and more like standing on ground that might give way beneath my feet.

There were moments when I wondered whether following truth might cost me my place — my friendships, my belonging, even my vocation.

A loneliness can emerge when your mind is searching but your community is standing still.

It feels like wandering through a library after the lights have gone out.

You know the wisdom is there.

But you are not sure you are allowed to read it.

But the Path of the Head begins with a simple discovery:

## **God is not threatened by truth.**

Not scientific truth.

Not historical truth.

Not psychological truth.

Not uncomfortable truth.

Truth belongs to God whether we acknowledge it or not.

And every honest question is a kind of prayer.

Jesus does not stand over Jerusalem shouting.

He stands grieving.

Longing to gather.

Longing to protect.

Longing to shelter.

Like a mother hen gathering her young.

It is one of the most tender images in all the Gospels.

And it tells me something about the Path of the Head.

The life of the mind is not meant to be lived alone.

Thinking is safest under wings.

Questions are safest in community.

Truth is safest when it is sought together.

In the Jewish stories I love, there is often a student who wrestles with a teacher.

Not out of disrespect.

Out of devotion.

The argument itself becomes a form of love.

The struggle itself becomes a path toward wisdom.

Faith is not preserved by imposed silence.

Faith is preserved by engagement.

In the Mapping the Sacred tradition, we speak of many paths.

The Path of the Soul teaches stillness.

The Path of the Heart teaches compassion.

The Path of Action teaches service.

The Path of Community teaches belonging.

But the Path of the Head teaches something just as sacred:

**Understanding is a form of devotion.**

Learning is a spiritual practice.

Study is a way of loving God.

In recent memory, it was when I was researching and writing my doctoral dissertation that I felt most like me, and felt closest to the Divine.

Jesus' lament ends with a strange promise:

*"You will not see me again until you say,  
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."*

It sounds like absence.

But it is also hope.

The door is not closed.

Understanding can come later.

Insight can come slowly.

Truth can take time.

Even closed minds can open.

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These Paths are not labels.

They are ways of walking.

And the Path of the Head is not reserved for scholars or theologians.

It belongs to anyone who has ever asked:

Is this true?

What does this mean?

Why does this matter?

Who am I becoming?

Where is God in all of this?

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I sometimes imagine that young student again, years later.

Perhaps he has become a teacher himself.

Perhaps he has learned that certainty is smaller than truth.

Perhaps he has learned that questions can be faithful.

Perhaps he remembers the day he heard Jesus weep over Jerusalem.

And perhaps he finally understands.

The desolation Jesus spoke of was never punishment.

It was the emptiness that comes when we refuse to learn.

But beneath all our learning,

beneath all our books and questions and theories,

beneath every argument and every insight,

there is something quieter.

God is still longing to gather us.

God is still making room for our searching minds.

God is still holding truth with gentleness.

And perhaps the Path of the Head begins here:

Not with answers.

Not with certainty.

But with a simple act of courage.

Opening the mind.

Trusting that wherever truth leads,

God will already be there.

Amen.