



June 26, 2022

Pentecost 3

Luke 9:51-62

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The Holy Gospel according to Luke, the 9th chapter...**Glory to you, O Lord.**

When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to prepare for his arrival, but they did not receive him because his face was set toward Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But he turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village.

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." And Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."¹

The gospel of our Lord...**Praise to you, O Christ.**

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Grace and Peace to you from the One who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

“No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” I must confess that on the first, second, twelfth and twentieth reading of this passage this is the line that wouldn’t let me go.

My name is Kathy Martin and prefer to use no pronouns. I live and work on the unceded traditional territory of Semiahmoo and Coast Salish peoples. We recognize that people have called this land home from long before any one of us took our first breath. We desire to live in right relations with all who are now on this land from its first peoples to its most recent arrivals, by birth and voyage. All of us relatives, members of the one human family.

I’m grateful to be with you in your worship today. I am the newest bishop in the ELCIC, ordained on Epiphany this January, and I serve in the BC Synod. I could tell you it’s all been smooth sailing, that I’ve been able to seamlessly slide into the new office, tweak a couple of things, and that everything is just humming along wonderfully. I could say that once I said yes to the call and put my hand on the plow I have never looked back. I could say it...but it wouldn’t be true.

This call by the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus into a new place, into a new season in life, is demanding, challenging, but also amazing. This is true for me, but I also know that it is true for you, and clearly true for these earliest followers of Jesus too.

The gospel doesn’t shy away from telling the difficulties of the life of faith. We hear it clearly in today’s gospel as Jesus “sets” his face to Jerusalem. And many of us know what will happen there. He is about to step closer into his sonship, his purpose, on a narrow path that few want to travel. And on his way (and this is interesting,) on his way he calls people...everyday ordinary people like us to walk with him. I know we say this often, but we ought to pause and let this sink in — because the invitation we are given is like none other.

(PAUSE — Let this sink in)

Walk with him. It sounds relatively simple doesn’t it. Walk with Jesus, but there are so many different ways to walk. Some stroll by with a fitness tracker on their arm and you can tell they are getting in their steps. Others are out on a leisurely stroll, and yet others stride by determined to get to where they are going by the most direct route possible. But walking with Jesus isn’t an ordinary walk at all.

In our Gospel Jesus is setting out on a journey, to Jerusalem. It is not about steps or lovely scenery; it’s not even about getting someplace in the quickest and easiest possible way. This journey involves not only the feet, but the heart. It is walking that engages, where the journey and the destination are equally important.

A number of years ago I walked the Camino de Santiago. This walk, often called The Way, is an ancient pilgrimage route that begins in France and makes its way across Spain. On the route there were all kinds of walkers, but perhaps most broadly they could be categorized as adventurers and pilgrims.

Adventurers and pilgrims travel in vastly different ways. The way of the adventurer is about entertainment and pleasure. The way of the pilgrim is more focused on meaning a purpose. For the adventurer the travel is in the service of the experience. The way of the pilgrim sees the journey itself of at least equal importance to the destination. The whole journey is of great value.

The adventurer avoids complication, difficulty, delay and tries to make the journey as effortless as possible. The pilgrim accepts or perhaps even welcomes the obstacles and detours that come along the way. To the pilgrim these things are of value, things that deepen and enrich the journey, they are open to being changed. There is a difference in attitude, in orientation, in a way of being.

Jesus demonstrates an attitude, orientation, and way of being to guide us. We heard in our gospel, "When the days drew near for [Jesus] to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem."

Jesus invites James and John, the disciples, other followers and us to join him on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. We know the story of what happened in Jerusalem, but we do not know what will come tomorrow. Following is an unpredictable journey. Things may not go as planned and there will be challenge all along the way. The outcome is rarely evident or obvious in the first steps.

There are uncompromising demands that are part of following Jesus, a reality he does not hide from us. In the transparency of love, He lets us know that following him will bring us into places that challenge our ideas about what is of most importance, into thinking differently about our responsibilities and the opportunities that come before us. We will find ourselves recalibrating life, reassessing our choices and actions through the lens of the gospel.

At times we will be called into work that we find uncomfortable, challenged in our views, moved beyond the status quo. This is especially true for those of us who are people of privilege, who live in the centre of life rather than the margins. As we do so, we begin the work of allowing God to change us. We make space for the Spirit to reveal the assumptions and understandings that hold us back on the journey. Then we are ready to step into the journey, on to the pilgrimage path with all, including those on the margins.

Jesus might be imagined as always facing Jerusalem, always facing head on what stands in the way of community, of love, of life. Facing Jerusalem, he refuses to give up on any of us, willing to take love to its furthest.

As God's people today, we will have to do exactly what Jesus is talking about. Following Jesus will mean lives that are radically reorientated from what they have been before, which really is a resurrection. Resurrection is life restored as we...

Let go of the past.

Bury what is dead and move on.

Leave the comforts of home.

And get moving.

Of course, Jesus knows that this is something we need to lean into and learn on the road. He knows we won't do this perfectly or sometimes even well. That isn't the point. When we falter, or look back over our shoulders, or when we cling to empty traditions, Jesus calls us to focus on the future, on Jerusalem, to recommit ourselves to the journey. Get up, help each other back on track, and point your compass, your policies, your worship, small groups, your decisions in a direction and manner worthy of Jerusalem.

Along the way we are never alone. In this Pentecost season we are fueled by the Holy Spirit and travel together. This Holy Spirit enables us to be the church today for the sake of the world and all creation. There is no journey like it, it is exciting, exhilarating and challenging all at the same time. Thanks be to God. AMEN

Let us pray:

*"O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN."*²

² Evangelical Lutheran Worship p. 317