



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School
1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094
(920)261-2570
A Stephen Ministry Congregation
www.goodshepherdwi.org

Third Sunday after Pentecost

June 30, 2019

“He Set His Face to go to Jerusalem”

(Luke 9:51, 57-62)

Rev. David K. Groth

“When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem . . . 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, let me first go and bury my father.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’ Yet another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.’ Jesus said to him, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.’” (Luke 9:51; 57-62)

Collect: Lord of all power and might, author and giver of all good things, graft into our hearts the love of Your name and nourish us with all goodness that we may love and serve our neighbor; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

Following Jesus is not a casual pastime. It's not a hobby we do on the side. It is not something we do as convenient. Nor is it simply one more thing we do, one more thing we add to the list of many things we already do. No, loyalty to Jesus takes precedence over everything else. That's what Jesus is saying in this text. Everything else on your list is of secondary importance. Of primary importance is following Jesus.

One of our international guests last week was a very kind and humble man from China doing research at UW-Madison in computer science. He's developing an app that hopes to better manage traffic flow. He has a pretty high powered career going at the university, and before that he worked for Hewlett Packard and Microsoft. Hua and Qing, husband and wife, were baptized just a couple of months ago, and with all humility he said "we are infants in the faith." Before lunch, he was asking me when and how I knew that I should go into the ministry. He was asking me because he's considering it himself.

We talked for a bit. I asked him about the concerns he has of Christians being persecuted in China. He nodded his head and said "It is a very real concern." He said the government in China is actually mandating changes to Scripture to make it more benign from the government's perspective. Moreover, Christian leaders are being arrested, detained, jailed. Unapproved churches are being shut down, their buildings repurposed, or demolished. And it's getting worse. Arrests are becoming more frequent and punishments more severe. Even so, this man is thinking of giving up his safe, prestigious and lucrative career in order to more closely follow Jesus.

It made me think: what would I be willing to give up in

order to be a more faithful follower of Jesus? Would I be willing to move away from my family and friends? That would be hard for me. (Yet wouldn't that be a ridiculous condition to place on Jesus? I will follow you Jesus; just don't make me move.) Would I be willing to give up living in a state I love, an area in which I feel deeply rooted, pursuing hobbies I love? Would I be willing to give up the comforts of first world living for the insecurities and daily frustrations of third world living? Would I be willing to sell the house and most of my possessions and move to Uganda, as Pastor and Karen Schempf have?

How about you? What conditions are you tempted to put on Jesus? I will follow you, Jesus, so long as I don't have to move away from my children and grandchildren. I will follow so long as I don't have to give up my financial security, my reputation, my routine, or my free time. What idols are you holding onto? We all have them, you know. An idol is something you would never be willing to give up. What are your idols? Finish this sentence: "Jesus, I am happy to follow you, so long as . . ." Finish the sentence. [PAUSE] With whatever you finished that sentence, that may be an idol. And you know about idols. Psalm 135, "The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; they have eyes, but do not see; they have ears, but do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths. Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them!" (vv. 15-18).

The commentaries point out how this text marks a turning point in Luke's account. Prior to these verses, Jesus has been teaching and healing in Galilee. Now he has [quote] "set his face to go to Jerusalem." That is, he knows there's a cross waiting for him in Jerusalem. To stay the course will require absolute determination. After all, the path of least resistance is anywhere but Jerusalem. But to save us entails going to Jerusalem. So the next ten chapters in Luke describe this journey as a time of escalating confrontations. It's also a time when those following Jesus are forced to take a closer look at what it might cost them to

follow Him.

Earlier Jesus had said, “Take up your cross and follow me”, but at the time he did not spell out what that meant. People might have taken it as some kind of ethereal ideal, which would be easy enough to forget or ignore. But here Jesus spells it out concretely, and the one who’s going to Jerusalem to suffer on a cross has no bargains to offer. “As they were going along the road, someone said to him, ‘I will follow you wherever you go.’ And Jesus said, in effect, “We don’t even know where we will rest our heads tonight, or if there will be a bed. Do you really think you are up for that kind of insecurity and discomfort?”

Another said, I will follow, but “Let me first go and bury my father.” Not an unreasonable request! But the response of Jesus is chilling. “Let the dead bury their own dead.” Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to my family.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

The point is loyalty to Jesus takes precedence over everything else. It takes precedence over comfort and security. It takes precedence over family. The idea here is that Jesus is claiming priority even over the best of human relationships, not the worst. Jesus never said to choose him over the devil, but to choose him over family.

A couple of weeks ago there was an article in the newspaper about an art exhibit that just opened in St. Louis. It’s a collection of statues that have been partially destroyed. It’s an exhibit about iconoclasm, the impulse to destroy or deface statues of deities or powerful people. Some of the statues on exhibit are more than four thousand years old, so of course, they are likely to have seen some random damage over the centuries. However, a lot of the damage isn’t random. They were deliberately mutilated. You can see the chisel marks – the scars left behind by intentional demolition, often to the same specific body parts: noses, left hands, and some eyes. In ancient Egypt, they actually believed that carving a sculpture of something brought that

thing to life, caused it to live. So the statue of a god or a ruler is not a portrayal as much as it is an incarnation. Therefore smashing a statue's nose, for instance, denied its bearer breath and life. (WSJ, 6/18/19).

The destruction of idols and statues wasn't just an ancient practice. There are more contemporary examples, such as when the U.S. Army in 1945 demolished a 50-foot-wide swastika in Nuremberg, Germany. It was iconoclasm when statues of Sadaam Hussein were pulled down in Iraq, and when ISIS destroyed the ancient ruins of Palmyra. It's iconoclasm when statues of Confederate memorials are removed in the South.

In our text, Jesus is engaged in his own sort of iconoclasm, but the idols he's toppling here are not the golden bulls of Baalism, nor that of a wicked foe. No, he's breaking the noses off the more common idols we bow down to that prevent us from fully following him, such as familial obligations, comfort, security, routine, health, and, reputation. Again, what idols do you have that get in the way of following Jesus?

In this text Jesus is telling us that following him is not a casual pastime. It's not a hobby on the side. It is not something we do as convenient. Nor is it simply one more thing we do, one more thing that we add to the list. No, loyalty to Jesus takes precedence over everything else. Everything else is secondary. Everything else is defined and shaped by this one thing: following Jesus.

Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem." The opposition to Jesus was increasing exponentially, and every day brings him a little closer to the cross. To stay the course required him to ignore his own needs and focus on ours. On this journey towards Calvary, he showed us what it means to be loyal, loyal to God and loyal to us. That loyalty took precedence over his familial relationships. He distanced himself from his own family in order to save us.

Loyalty to us took precedence over his reputation. He couldn't control the lies people were saying about him, but he could control where he was headed, and so he stayed

the course to the cross out of loyalty to the Father and to us.

That loyalty to God and to our salvation took precedence over his sense of safety and security, as when he was betrayed by Judas and given over into the hands of lawless men.

That loyalty took precedence over his dignity and pride, as when he was stripped.

It took precedence over his comfort and health, as when the soldiers roughed him up, and then flogged him to within a few inches of his life, and then crucified him.

There was nothing more important to Jesus than our redemption from sin and death. It wasn't a little hobby on the side for him. It wasn't just one more thing on his list. No, it was the central thing, and it shaped and defined everything else. Dying on the cross for us took precedence over everything else.

In this text, he's not asking would be disciples to do anything for him that he hasn't already done for us. He's only asking us to take Christian discipleship seriously. It's not one more thing on the list. No, it defines and shapes the rest of the list.

Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem" for you and for your salvation. That's done. That's accomplished. Nothing can change that, or undo that, nor do you need to do anything to complete it. But the question of this text is: he set his face for the cross in Jerusalem. Are you willing to set your face to follow him? Amen.

