

Sixth Sunday After Pentecost

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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June 26, 2016

*On Roads From Jerusalem* – Luke 9:51-62; Galatians 5:1, 13-25

The Gospel reading speaks of Jesus “setting his face to go to Jerusalem.” It is clear that this marks a deep change in Jesus. Let us see.

Jesus’ path to Jerusalem starts by passing through a Samaritan village. Jews looked down upon Samaritans as half-castes and the disciples sent ahead must have shown it for the Samaritans offer them no hospitality. And, as the logic of racial pride unfolds, James and John feel insulted. “Jesus, let us command fire from heaven to consume them!”

But strangely, Jesus does not call his disciples together to teach them wisdom. He rebukes them for their unredeemed racism. He rebukes not teaches. His face is set toward Jerusalem, but they persist in petty religious sectarianism. Has Jesus has lost patience with their interminable small-mindedness?

Next, Jesus and the disciples are now walking on the road to Jerusalem when some hapless soul blurts out. “I will follow you Jesus wherever you go!” Jesus responds quite uncharacteristically with sayings that amount to, “Well, I am going nowhere. Do you really want to follow me to nowhere?” Again, we see that change. Is it exasperation, is it desperation, resignation? It is as if Jesus is steeled with foreboding for what lies ahead in Jerusalem. Camaraderie is not enough!

Jesus does invite someone to follow him. But having just lost his father he pleads, “Let me go and bury my father first.” And again, a very changed

Jesus responds so uncharacteristically, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the new presence of God.”

Having buried family relations, this response from Jesus cuts us as callous, insensitive and plainly nasty. But this is the new Jesus, a Jesus who has set his sights on Jerusalem. How would you react if Jesus spoke this way in your grief? Why does he **do** this?

And, as if we miss the point, Luke tells of a third incident in which Jesus again rips apart all the accepted social norms. Shock therapy. Someone else wants to join the march to Jerusalem, but asks, “Let me first say farewell to my family.” To that Jesus says, “No! Start walking now with me to Jerusalem and don’t look back.”

What has happened to Jesus? He is slicing through the settled sensibilities of the human landscape with a cruel plow. Gone is that tender and humane soul. Gone is the patience and openness. And in its place is this steely, hard determination to get to Jerusalem at all costs. What has happened? Why such cost?

I can only say that this person of peace, this person of such profound simplicity, who sees clearly how a compassionate God is present in and with all people, especially the forgotten and marginalized, this person has changed –yet in a very human way.

He has great foreboding of what Jerusalem will soon mean for his life. Like your first dentist experience. He also knew that this motley band of disciples, both women and men from all sectors of Jewish society, could not be depended on for much of anything. Wouldn’t anyone caught between these two harsh realities be so uptight and so changed, even chastened bitterly? Has not such steeling and even hardness come upon us in times when all our life’s options turn sour? Is it not so human?

And yet Jesus says that to grasp the presence of God breaking into our world requires such commitment. Our cities will never know this presence of God without such seriousness in our discipleship. Our cities will never know God's presence unless we intend to show the compassion for Jesus. For we know what he knew.

Whatever happened in Jerusalem –with the chaos, the violence and the destruction of the Jesus movement by the power elite, with all that very bad news, paradoxically, some good news came forth: there was a Word about a new start for the world and for every living person. And in that new start was forgiveness and liberation from whatever would hold you back. This was a new kind of freedom.

And this is where we are located this morning. Not on the road to Jerusalem, but on the roads out from Jerusalem into of our lives. We live in a new state of being walking the streets of our city. As St. Paul says in the second reading, “For freedom Christ has set you free.” Jesus has won for us, for the whole world, a freedom, a hope for freedom, a life in freedom that happens at once and yet takes years, even centuries and millennia to reach the fullness of its promise for all. We are stewards of that promise.

We have that gift of freedom now –a freedom to love our neighbor as ourselves. This congregation, its groups of friends, its families of whatever shape and size, every individual: we all have been promised and gifted with a freedom to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. We are on this road from Jerusalem into our daily lives on the streets and workplaces of our city. It's not always easy. But we have the love of the Spirit within our reach.

Whatever meaning we give to our lives –it's true freedom if we can freely love our neighbors as ourselves. What use are human rights if we sew them with hate, resentment rather than love? Then we are not free but

enslaved to a lesser vision of ourselves and of God.

It is the living Christ who speaks to us through this humanly disturbing Gospel reading this morning and through St. Paul inviting us to live by that Spirit of freedom we have received through our baptism. St. Paul counsels us not to abuse that freedom with self-indulgence. Living by the flesh for St. Paul means self-centered using of others. But St. Paul counsels you to use your freedom to reach out to others, to care for them rather than just for yourself. Splendid and nurturing community.

Jesus' setting his face toward Jerusalem brings forth a new perspective of him as a human being. Through the Jerusalem disaster came a new sense of freedom that calls us to walk along the roads of our lives, not alone, but in community. You have been baptized by water into that spirit of freedom. You share the thanksgiving for that spirit of freedom in the Eucharist. Living and guided by the spirit let us set our faces on the roads of our lives away from Jerusalem towards the day when God's presence will be known and received. And let us walk with all people of goodwill who share that same vision. Amen