

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Pentecost 3C - Proper 8C
June 26, 2022
Luke 9:51-62

Don't Look Back

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

There's something about having a goal and a way to reach it. It's true in so many areas of life. When you're going on vacation, it's helpful to know where you're going, how you're going to get there, what you're going to do or see on the way and when you arrive. At work and school it's helpful to know the way to accomplish the desired goal. Goals are so important there is no end to the books and speakers promoting the necessity of setting goals and how to do it. Of course, such goals should and must be godly and God-pleasing. If the goal is wicked, sinful, and evil, it should never be reached.

Now, what happens when someone doesn't know the goal or the path to get there? What happens when there's disagreement on the goal or some other misunderstanding arises? Well, we hear all that in today's Gospel.

Now, the first thing about this passage is that it marks a change in St. Luke's Gospel and it sets the stage for all that follows. "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem." That's the goal. Jesus sets His face to go to Jerusalem where He will suffer and die for the sins of the world, rise, and ascend to the right hand of His Father. He always had the end clearly in sight. He never looked back. Though He was God in the flesh, He didn't look back on that as something to hang on to. He didn't dwell on the glory that was His before He became incarnate. He kept the goal, the end, before Him, and that goal was the cross and resurrection and your salvation.

Now as He was headed to Jerusalem, He sent some messengers ahead of Him to prepare His way. They entered a Samaritan village but were rejected. You see, the Samaritans were constantly at enmity with the Jews, and vice versa. Among the points of contention was that the Samaritans thought that God should be worshiped on Mt. Gerizim, whereas the Jews worshiped in Jerusalem. And since Jesus was headed to Jerusalem, the Samaritans rejected Him, thus anticipating Jesus' rejection in Jerusalem too.

But the disciples believed that this rejection should be met by divine rejection itself. They wanted to call down wrath and vengeance upon those Samaritans. But they didn't understand that Jesus' mission as the Messiah was to be the Suffering Servant. As such, He would Himself

bear divine wrath. For His mission was one of mercy and compassion, not condemnation. Punishment for those who reject Him and the Gospel would come in the eschaton, the end of the world. So Jesus rebukes James and John for their desire ran contrary to His saving work. For Jesus' desire is that all would live to hear the Gospel another day so that they may repent and be saved.

Then they continued toward Jerusalem. As they did, Jesus encountered some others. The first said, "I will follow you wherever you go." But did he really know what he was saying? After all Jesus is going to Jerusalem to suffer the ultimate rejection that would result in His suffering and death. He was homeless on earth. So to follow Him means to depart from all that belongs to this world. For unlike the foxes and birds, Jesus did not have a place to lay His head, not even in death.

To another, Jesus says, "Follow me." But this one wanted to go bury his dead father first. And another says, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." But Jesus knows what lurks within the hearts of men. So He shows that there is nothing more important than following Him. Following Jesus entails subordinating all things – all family ties and other worldly cares – and focusing on the task that lies ahead. For the way of new life is not an easy, painless way. It is the way of death for the old man, in daily contrition and repentance. It requires staying on the hard road of pilgrimage that leads to the cross, through death, and finally to resurrection. It calls for an unhesitating departure from ties to the old life, even the ties to family.

And while this life is hard, having Jesus with us is everything. Having been baptized into Christ and His death and resurrection, our goal is to follow Him no matter what for that will lead us to life everlasting. As we abide in Him and He in us, we are connected to the vine which gives us life (John 15:4-6). And there is no life apart from that vine. And thus abiding in Him, we don't look back. We don't try to live in the past. No, we live in the present, always looking forward. And "let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb. 12:1-2). That's straining for the prize that is set before us. That's keeping our eyes on the goal.

This is vital for the children of God because the results of looking back are devastating. Consider Israel as Moses led them out of slavery in Egypt. They were always looking back, wanting to go back, thinking it was better before they left Egypt. They kept looking back instead of trusting God and His promises. They would rather live in bondage in Egypt rather than live in freedom in the land God was leading them to to give them. And many of them died in the wilderness because of their stubborn refusal to receive God's blessings in faith and joy.

Of course, I guess the ultimate story of the dangers of looking back is Lot's wife. God had sent messengers to bring Lot and his family out of Sodom. He wanted to deliver them from the great wickedness there and the impending destruction. But when Lot told his sons-in-law what was going to happen, they thought he was joking. The angels urged Lot to get moving, but still he

lingered. So the angels took him by the hand, along with his wife and two daughters, and mercifully led them outside the city. They were told to escape for their lives and not to look back or stop anywhere in the valley. But Lot's wife, who was behind him, looked back and she became a pillar of salt.

Beloved, you are the children of God. He has called you out of this sin-filled world to be His and to follow His Son. There is nothing more important for you. That is life for you, and anything and everything else is death. So don't be distracted by anything else and don't look back. Always look ahead. And with St. Paul, "[forget] what lies behind and [strain] forward to what lies ahead, . . . [pressing] on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:13-14). God grant you to do so. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener