

Dr. Caroline Carson 3
Sixth Sunday After Pentecost
Year C
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2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14
Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20
Galatians 5:1,13-25
Luke 9:51-62

Jesus “set his face” to Jerusalem. We’ve all “set our faces” to do something... to get something accomplished, to finish a project that. This determination and focus that we have when we “set our faces” is what we should harness when it comes to following Christ, his teachings, and when making life decisions after prayerful consideration. What if we make mistakes? Do we think of turning back?

In today’s Gospel, a village of Samaritans did not receive Jesus. I know where this area is! Our pilgrimage group drove through portions of Samaria. Jesus spent his much of his life in Galilee. Except for being born in Bethlehem and about two years in Egypt after this, He grew up, lived, and worked in close proximity to the Sea of Galilee. I can’t tell you how exciting and fulfilling to have been there and to have a real image of this place in my mind, eyes, and heart!

When Jesus began his ministry, he was in Capernaum and, from there, went out to preach and teach and heal - proclaiming the Kingdom of God to

all who would listen. But, he kept coming back to Capernaum by the sea.

So, why does that matter?

Because Jesus isn't going home anymore.

No turning back.

This passage we heard today represents a precise moment – “the beginning of the end”. He is headed to Jerusalem, that center of Jewish faith and livelihood. Jerusalem, the golden. Jerusalem, where soon, people would turn against him.

In spite of the fact that a week later, he will be crucified, Jesus is not looking back and encourages the disciples not to either. This message parallels the taking up of Elijah “in the whirlwind” and Luke here wants us to know that this is the beginning of the end by telling us directly that it’s before Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension where he will be “taken up”. (Commentary)

Not being received in the Samaritan village... it wasn't unusual for Samaritans to refuse Jewish people on their way to Jerusalem. It could have been cultural or a result of Jesus' outward determination and moving through quickly along his way, “setting his face”.

No turning back.

He was on a mission to Jerusalem. James and John ask him if he'd like them to call upon the smiting element of fire to destroy the villagers.

Wouldn't it be convenient for us – if we were able to press that vaporize button in the car when someone cuts us off or almost causes a wreck? It might also come in handy when the line is a thousand people and the counter closes before we get there. That's imaginary....and who among us REALLY wants to cause actual harm? Jesus' reaction to James and John's question provides an example of their temptation to use violence, anger, or frustration to solve the "problem". It also sounds rather convenient, the way they phrased it. How many times in today's world do we see examples of each "side" believing that they're "right" and using deadly force to justify their goals? I'm not talking about ancient history either. Differing opinions on LGBT rights, territorial disputes, parental control, economic disaster issues, war. How many times has Christ's name been used in these scenarios or "being Christian" used as a reason behind agendas?

When 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."* It seems Jesus is giving fair warning that there aren't many creature comforts and there's not much security in following him presently. There would be *no turning back*. Stop and consider the costs. He knew what was to come.

Failure - "strike one" - we don't hear of the person continuing with them.

How many times have we doubted – only to see that God provides. Trust is needed.

Another asks if he may bury his father before he follows Jesus and is told "let the dead bury their own dead". Here, the opportunity, the call to follow Jesus must come above all other things, it means going forward despite the cost. (Commentary p. 216). Saying you shouldn't bury your father sounds rather harsh, but isn't Jesus really getting at the idea of divided loyalties? Let those who remain unaffected by spiritual things, take care of the physical dead. If you are spiritually alive enough to recognize Christ's call, then follow, without hindrance. Strike two? Again, the individual means well, but isn't following him. Trust, and risk, are needed.

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 a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." Strike three – turning back. This passage reminds me of Lot and his wife - her looking back and turning into a pillar of salt. Musically, it also reminds me of the myth of Orpheus with his lute, turning back to Eurydice in what Virgil called the "madness of love". In both cases, turning back broke the "deal" and both men were bereft of their wives. So, does this disobedience to God result in finality? In 6th century BC mythology it did. In the time of Lot and the cities of Sodom and

Gomorrah it did. The cities may have been destroyed as the result of a natural disaster. Geo-Archaeology says that the Dead Sea was devastated by an earthquake between 2100 and 1900 BC, which could have unleashed showers of steaming tar. Clearly -

No turning back.

And just what does happen if we look back while plowing? Our rows will be crooked. This makes perfect sense to me now because of the Palestinian hills I saw a little over a week ago. The land is rocky beyond belief. Looking back would cause great issue. Discipleship requires focus. If we look away and alter our course one degree while crossing an ocean, it spells trouble. Using the 60 to 1 rule in aviation, for every degree you fly off course, you'll miss your target by 92 feet every mile. That's about one mile off for every sixty flown.

If you started at the equator and flew around the earth, one degree off would land you about 500 miles off target. So, ***the longer you travel off course, the further you will be away from the intended target.*** Is that acceptable? Nooooo. On a flight from LGA to LAX, that might put me 40 miles into the Pacific Ocean. One degree off could be the difference between making it to a conference on time, or actually using the seat as a flotation device.

My discernment was and is - a period of exploring the ins and outs of the call to serve Christ (*We're all called to serve Christ*). What is the right course? Initially, it IS a period of having that option to discuss turning back. My call to follow where God leads was revealed and determined – officially and out loud. It was uncovered and I feel like it's a garment I've been wearing that now shines brighter.

Joyfully, No turning back!

So, how do we – not “*make*”, but *allow* Jesus to be a priority in our lives? It *is* really up to us. Have you noticed that he *invites* rather than coerces?

Those who use Christianity itself as a weapon do not hold following Christ as a priority. It seems they check off “doing” various things that are “required” in order to “prove” their right or to get into Heaven. From the Gospel of Matthew: (6:33) “*Seek ye **first** the Kingdom of God*”.

Proclaiming the gospel is not limited to the disciples we read about in the past. Each of us must stay the course and commit to following God's lead. We all have varied gifts. What are yours? How will you use them, moving forward, not looking back. There must be diversity within the ministry of Christ's body. How much will we each trust God, perhaps blindly and without anywhere to lay out head? How will we *not turn back*?

My discernment is now a question of how, when, and where to follow. I'm moving, leaving job, career, family, and friends – for a great unknown.

There needs to be a focused commitment, a study without distractions, without extra tasks to finish up, to follow where God leads.

No turning back!rather a turning into.

My discernment WILL BE ongoing. Time passes, we learn, we live, and experience God's working in our lives. Rather than looking back to make sure my plow is doing its job, I've got to look forward and *trust* that God *will* lead me. That is often very difficult because I'm a planner aaaaand a bit of a control freak. I'll be shaped: molded in spirit and sculpted in the foundation of Christ's teachings. I'm nervous. I'm more excited though. I have those errands to run and things to do before I go, but they seem of little consequence now that I am becoming more focused. A life of faith asks that we move forward, step by step, not letting the distractions of the world lure us away.

(Sung) - I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back....no turning back!