

Sermon Proper 8 2019

June 30, 2019

Luke 9:51-62

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read, especially these words: “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

When we look at the world around us, what would you say the world values? In the words of this passage that I just read, what would you say that the world has its face set toward? As I’ve been meditating on this passage this week, that’s something I’ve been asking myself as well. And as I thought about it, I thought about it in terms of things like to what do we dedicate our money, and our time, and our abilities?

Think about it. First of all our money. Look at what we spend our money on. I was fortunate enough to get have a friend who was given some Cubs tickets this week, but who was unable to go to the game, so he gave them to me. As I was at the game though, it struck me how much we spend on sports and sports stadiums. Of course Wrigley Field is somewhat unique amongst sports stadiums because of its age, but even there I thought about how our sports stadiums have become our temples in a sense. Isn’t it interesting how much we are willing to spend on stadiums or on tickets, and yet in the midst of that our churches fall into disrepair, or are constructed in ways that reflect much poorer craftsmanship than these gathering places.

Or look at our hospitals. We have hospitals that, again, reflect craftsmanship far beyond many new churches being built, or reflect updating that churches don’t get. For example, look at the age of Hinsdale hospital and yet the inner workings there are much finer than many churches I step foot into.

And then there’s our time and our abilities. How much time do we spend in our culture teaching our kids how to throw a perfect baseball, or telling them about the Beatles changed everything with music? Or maybe we spend time teaching them more important knowledge for life, maybe something we enjoy, but could have real earthly value, like fishing, or about the history of the world. How much time do we spend with these things in comparison to teaching them the faith?

And our talents, look at what we glorify in our talents. We gawk at artists who glorify every kind of sexual impropriety and worship those with physical talents beyond what we can ask or imagine for ourselves. We can see that we value entertainment, we value earthly pleasure, and of course sex and sexual liberty.

Now I've been speaking broadly about our culture. And as I do that, as I start there, I do so intentionally. Obviously, I'm making a point about the focus of our culture in its dedication to the things of this world. And as I do that we can see how this morning's lesson applies to this dedication. Here Jesus is making His way to Jerusalem, and He's moving that way toward His own death, and what do we see Him doing on the way?

He calls people to follow Him, and He does it with the clear indication that this is no picnic. In our day where we so often want to soften the requirements of church membership, Jesus doesn't say things that jive with that. You want to follow Jesus? Know that it's hard. This Jesus, this Son of Man doesn't have anywhere to lay His head. You'll have to be like Him, sleep on rocks. How's that for recruiting and Church Growth?

Or look at the call here. Don't even go and say goodbye to your family. Come follow me now. Don't put your hand to the plow. Don't turn back and look. Any other focus shows that you're not worthy of the Kingdom of God.

To come back to the things I mentioned before for a second, we have to say, it's not as though it's sinful for us to enjoy sports, or to want to be treated in a hospital. It's not as though it's even inherently wrong for us to enjoy things like fishing, or the history of rock and roll. These things aren't inherently wrong. So what's the problem? What's Jesus talking about here? He's making the point that we can't have a divided allegiance. We can't have a divided focus.

So ask yourself, what divides your allegiance? Where are you still grabbing onto a plow? What makes you look back and question your call to faithfulness? Or, in terms of time, what do you see as worthwhile with your time? Is it Scripture? Is it the Divine Service and the promises God gives here? Or finally, what about talent and money? Do you see these as most worthwhile spent when spent serving God's Kingdom and others? Or for money is it best spent on comforts and things? What are you willing to sacrifice?

I was looking back at the last time I preached on this passage and was reminded of something that was so convicting for me. It was from the Lutheran Church in Haiti. You see my home congregation had some ties to some Lutheran pastors in Haiti who told us about their experiences prior to this connection. Before this relationship had been established, the arrangement had been in place that these pastors had received support from another Lutheran organization. However, the trouble had come when someone within that organization determined that the Lutheran pastors in Haiti needed to stop confessing that the body and blood of Jesus are actually in with and under the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. Likewise, they were told to treat baptism as merely a symbolic act. If they didn't do these two things, their support would be withdrawn.

As I said last time, as a new Lutheran I was shocked and impressed at the decision these Lutheran pastors that I knew had made. They had elected to confess the truth of God's Word no matter the consequences. And this really struck me. On the one hand, I knew they were right, but how easy would it have been to justify the need for the money when they knew they would have people in their congregation who would starve without that care? All the more, it wasn't as though they were being asked to deny Christ, or confess some other God besides the Triune One. No, how easy it would be to justify fudging on this? I mean, we don't believe that someone will not be saved if they don't think that the Lord's Supper is the true body and blood of Jesus. If they say Jesus isn't God, that's one thing, but the wrong understanding of the Lord's Supper? Not as bad.

The witness of these pastors showed it; they were singularly devoted to the Word of Jesus, to His Kingdom. At least in this situation, they could clearly say that by God's grace, they were keeping this call to Jesus. But notice I said in this situation. The truth we all know is that no one keeps this call in all things. We all have a divided allegiance in some way or another, don't we? But look at Jesus: undivided allegiance; a singular focus.

You see this phrase for our meditation this morning says it. Hear that again, **"When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem."** He set His face to go to Jerusalem.

If you know your Old Testament, you know that God turning His face toward or away from something is an important image. If God turned His face away from you,

that was bad. If He turned away from you, you were cursed, you were abandoned. But if He turned His face toward you, that meant He saw you. Now it could mean that He saw you in judgment, in anger, which was also bad. But often, I would say most often, when God turned His face toward you, it meant good things. It meant that He remembered you, that He promised to do something for you. It meant that His attention was on you and your care.

When Jesus set His face toward Jerusalem, then, that showed His myopic view and singular dedication toward that city. Of course, what did the city actually represent in this case? What was so important about Jerusalem? That's where His death was coming. That's where He was going to die for the forgiveness of sins for all people. Yes they were divided in their allegiance, but Jesus wasn't divided in His love. This world was a rebellious mess, is a rebellious mess. We're rebellious messes, and yet Jesus' love is undivided toward us. It is a singular focus, a myopic intent: our salvation.

And He looks at you, He looks at your sin, and He still says, "my face is set toward you, toward your forgiveness." He looks at you and says, "that death in Jerusalem, that blood shed for your sin, is to do it all for you. The resurrection from that death is the promise of your resurrection. Your baptism, your nourishment with my body and blood, all of this to show my undivided love that lies at the basis of my work for you."

Have you thought of it in that way? Have you considered His intent so focused? It is. And it is because of that love. So, then, when you hear the things that would draw you away from our Lord, when you are tempted to the things of this world, to her comforts, to her divided care for you, remember the One who isn't divided in that care. Remember the One who turned His face toward Jerusalem for you, and who has turned His face now toward you in the promise that He still is with you, that He still sees you, that He still cares for you.

In fact, think about how you hear this at the end of the service every Sunday, think about what I as our Lord's called servant, His mouthpiece, say to you in His stead, "The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace." Amen.