

July 14 2013

Scripture Lesson ~ *Colossians 1:3-14*
Luke 9:51-62

Sermon *Don't Look Back!*

You don't have to wait until the next parish to tell tales out of school about your sister. Matter of fact, I learned a valuable lesson one year when I came west for a week to visit my sister a few years ago. We were taking a walk in the dark together in Othello chattering away, hiking right along when I decided to look back at a text that I had received from a friend of mine on the cell phone and I decided while I was at it I decided I would try and text back. As I was texting, I failed to see a guy wire holding up a utility pole, right next to the sidewalk. Somehow I hooked my arm around the wire and was flipped around 180 degrees, fell on my hands and knees and in the process I scrapped my hands and knees, put holes in my pants and I really damaged my dignity in the process. Now my sister thought this was hilarious especially since I was texting at the time, but the valuable lesson I learned was this. Never look back when you should be moving forward.

In this case with texts, but as a general principle I think that this holds true as well. I think this is the point that Jesus was making in our lesson from the gospel for today. It begins by saying that Jesus had set his face to go to Jerusalem and that was clear. In other words, after struggling within himself as to whether he should go and face his destiny in Jerusalem, he made a decision, he made the decision to fulfill what he understood to be God's plan for his life. He looked at his experience as a ministry, he thought and he meditated and he prayed. He examined the scriptures and now he was resolute. He would move forward in his life no matter what came his way.

And so in the text, when the next town refused to receive him rather than follow his hot headed disciples and destroying the place or letting himself fall into a sense of discouragement he stayed true to his mission. And he stayed true to his convictions. And he simply moved on to the next town. And then came a strange set of individuals who tried to throw up roadblocks and give excuses as to why they think what Jesus is doing is really crazy and really not the place for them during the course of life.

The first one you notice an overzealous man who tries to idealize what Jesus journey was all about. Probably imagined himself a lot more ready to make the journey than he really was. He simply says, I will follow you Jesus wherever you go. But again Jesus remains true to his convictions, and is realistic about the journey, by reminding the man that there will be hardships to those who choose to follow in the pathway of Jesus.

Next Jesus encounters a situation that makes us want to say that Jesus handled it in a kind of cruel and callous way, a man who wants to follow Jesus very much but has just lost his father and wants to bury his father, grieve, tie up the loose ends, and then follow and immediately comes the cruel sounding statement "Let the dead bury their own dead". In other words, even in the midst of personal ties, even in the midst of unfinished business, even in the midst of difficulty and death, Jesus says you keep moving forward, you keep moving forward, nothing can distract, nothing can delay following in the pathway of Jesus.

Finally he meets a man that wants to go, but he seems to want to tend to home and family before making the move. And Jesus eyes this as this as yet another distraction, just another delaying tactic and this is where Jesus' words about not looking back come into the picture in that context that we spoke of earlier of a farming illustration of a farmer plowing a field.

As I mentioned before I am not a farmer, but I have been around farming for most of my life, and I was smart enough to know that plowing a field can't continue as Roger demonstrated with the children before us to look back, and back and keep from being knocked to the ground when texting is the same kind of thing and be able to follow Jesus at the same time. This is well and good for Jesus, who clearly seemed to have a mission from God. Jesus who we see as unemotional and other worldly most of the time, Jesus whose face was immovably focused towards his destination. The question is, what about us? What does this text have to say to us.

Well I think Jesus said it best when he said you can't be looking back, you can't be easily distracted, and you can't lose the courage of your conviction if you want to make a difference in the work of the kingdom of God. And what does that mean for us as everyday people. Everyday people who want to walk on this journey of faith, everyday people who want to follow God, everyday people who want to follow in God's mission, and share God's love in the world around us, in this day and in this age. It doesn't mean that we don't need to tend to the everyday matters of life. It doesn't mean that from time to time we need to tend to the needs of our families. It doesn't mean that tragedy and illness will not delay us sometimes on our pathway as we move forward in the pathways of Jesus.

Of course the answer to all of these things is no. We are human, we have jobs, we have families, we will have bumps of illness, or death, or financial difficulties, or family problems along life's way. We will even at times have to wrestle at times with the past, deal with our grief and our sorrow, our hurt and our bitterness and even at times with our sense of forgiveness of those around us. But the question is, will these things distract us, will they delay us for long periods of time, will they even get us to abandon our journey of faith altogether as we travel those dusty roads of life with Jesus.

I think Jesus saw full well how human beings even people of faith tend to complicate their lives with a point that faith can become squelched and our journey gets way off track at times in the process. You know as well as I do, we look back at our hurts, we look back at our bitterness, our forgiveness, our anger and get distracted. We look back at our fears which can sometimes completely paralyze us in life. We look back at those times when we think about all those material things that we collect during the course of life, our houses, and our cars and all that stuff a lot of which we really don't need in the process of life. We look back at the mess we have sometimes made with relationships with family and friends. And finally we look back at the endless activities that we get ourselves involved with at home, at work, at school, in the community, and yes even here in the midst of the church.

And any of the above can smother, any of the above can distract, any of the above can distract and even derail us, from the path of faith that God desires us to travel in life. And so, Jesus calmly says "Don't look back, move forward, move forward" don't be a rubbernecker on life's highway, but instead move on towards that exciting place that God wants each one of us to be. And so that old saying from the fable of Aesop I believe is true, about the tortoise and the hare. Slow and steady wins the race. So hang on to your plow, keep your furrows straight, don't look back, don't look back! Together we say Amen.