

Luke 9:51-62, "HEADING TO JERUSALEM" (Pentecost 6C) '16

Every state tries to picture itself as the ideal place to live, to work & to play. At the border of Wisconsin and Illinois there is a sign [before entering Illinois] that says: "Why go back?" For several years New York has effectively used the slogan: "I (heart) N.Y." Disney Corporation uses winners from the Olympics to the Super Bowl to say [after their victory], "I'm going to Disney World."

Jesus had a trip planned, too. His trip was "TO JERUSALEM." But it was not a vacation. Today we join Him as – He is "HEADING TO JERUSALEM."

1. First, Jesus is going "TO JERUSALEM" with singleness of purpose. Our text begins: "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem" (v.51). There is something striking about these words. Instead of saying that the time had come for Jesus to suffer and die, we are rather told that "the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven." "JERUSALEM" and Calvary wasn't the final destination. "JERUSALEM" was only a stopping point on a journey to a far more glorious destination. But to get to His final destination there had to be a stop [at a place] that is now a top tourist attraction. The spot was "JERUSALEM."

The point of Jesus' stop there isn't spelled out so clearly here. But it's clear from other times when Jesus spoke to His disciples. On one occasion He said, "We are going up to Jerusalem...and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise." (Mk. 10:33-34).

There is no mystery about why Jesus was headed for "JERUSALEM." He was going there to die. He knew *how* He would die. It would be at the hands of "the Gentiles," that means the Romans and His death would be by crucifixion. Jesus also knew *why* He would die. It wouldn't be for a crime, not even – blasphemy. On January 17<sup>th</sup>, Oscar Bolin Jr. was given a legal injection by the Florida executioner. Oscar received the death penalty because he had been convicted of killing three women. Jesus is going to get the death penalty, but for no crime at all. The real reason *why* Jesus travels "TO JERUSALEM" is to lay down His life as a sacrifice for sin. The Bible says, "...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk. 10:45). There we have the point of the trip "TO JERUSALEM." He was HEADING there to give His life "as a ransom."

We have people making important trips all the time. President Obama has recently traveled to Cuba, Argentina, Saudi Arabia, England & Germany. He went there to discuss treaties, trade, terrorism & tactics. His mission was to strengthen U.S. ties with these countries. But will President Obama's mission make any real difference in your life? Will his promises make any difference when you die? It is at that point that you see the value of the mission that Christ undertook when He headed "TO JERUSALEM." What Christ accomplished [on His mission] was the forgiveness of sins. Jesus' trip "TO JERUSALEM" was necessary for us to make the trip to "heaven."

2. Second, as Jesus is "HEADING TO JERUSALEM" He shows love for all. Here's what happened. "He (Jesus) sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading to Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village." (vs.52-56). The Samaritans were a people of Jewish and Gentile mixture. This fact plus a history of hostile actions by the Samaritans against the Jews and the Jews against the Samaritans – caused a mutual hatred. Jesus overlooked this

animosity and tried to stay at “a Samaritan village,” but when the people heard that He was really “HEADING TO JERUSALEM” they “did not welcome him.” This snub towards Jesus prompted “James and John” to ask if they should call down fire “from heaven” to punish them? They are thinking back at how the Prophet Elijah had called down fire against the soldiers of King Ahaziah. (2 Kgs.1:9-16). But Jesus did not come to this earth to strike down sinners with His anger, but rather to win them with His love. If Jesus had allowed these Samaritans to be turned into ashes (and He had the power to do it) how could any of them be saved? How could they learn about what Jesus did in “JERUSALEM” if they had been killed in anger beforehand? The only blood that Jesus wanted on His hands was the blood that would come from the nails that held Him to the cross. Jesus was “HEADING TO JERUSALEM” with love, not hatred & revenge.

This is a key concept in Scripture. God is a God of love. He does not want “to destroy” anyone. This is what the Bible teaches when we’re told: “God our Savior...wants all...to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim.2:4). There are no exceptions to that either. Jesus wanted to save these Samaritans and His disciple Judas. Jesus died for Peter and Pontius Pilate. Jesus went “TO JERUSALEM” [in love] for Warren Buffet and Rick Warren, Michael J. Fox and Michael Jordan, Paris Hilton and Judge Judy. How many of them will be in heaven depends on how many of them believe in the message of Jesus’ love. But on His part, Jesus had love for – all!

3. Third, as Jesus is “HEADING TO JERUSALEM” He explains the demands of discipleship. Luke records three scenarios about people forced to contemplate the cost of following Jesus. The first situation: “As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” (vs.57-58). This man is a volunteer. He *wants* to follow Jesus. But Jesus reminds him of what the cost would be for him – personally. “Foxes” and “birds” had places to call their home, but not Jesus. If this man wasn’t willing to give up the comfort of his home then he might not want “to follow” Jesus.

The second situation: “He said to another man, “Follow me.” But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (vs.59-60). Jesus tries to recruit this man to “follow” Him. This man, however, tells Jesus, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” It sounds as though he’s trying to delay his decision. He doesn’t say that his father has *just* died, because if that were the case he would be taking care of the burial [at once]. Rather he wanted to wait *until* his father died and then he would feel free to “follow” Jesus. In simple terms, his attachment to his father seemed to be greater than his willingness to “follow” Jesus. Jesus’ response was, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” That may sound harsh, but what Jesus was suggesting is that those people who are spiritually dead can handle the task of burying dead people, but only a follower of Jesus can spread the Gospel.

The third situation: “Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” (Lk. 9:61-62). This is another volunteer who wants to be a follower of Jesus but again family ties were going to delay him. Remember Jesus can read hearts and He knows how committed this man is or isn’t. To be a Christian can’t be something half-hearted. Jesus puts it this way: “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God” (v.62). Plowing with oxen took a lot of effort and concentration. You couldn’t keep the plow going straight or in

the furrow if you were looking back. Jesus used that as a picture of a person who wants to be a follower of Jesus but isn't fully committed.

Friends, it's good to want to be there at the death bed of a loved one. It's good to love your family and show them you love them. It's good to have hobbies, to take time off, to travel, to enjoy the life that God has given you. But it is when *these* 'good things' of life come first and before Jesus that's when we get into trouble, because our heart is divided.

A tavern proprietor locked up his place at 2:00 a.m. and went straight home to bed. He had slept only a few minutes when the telephone rang. He picked up the phone and heard an obviously inebriated man ask, "What time do you open up the tavern in the morning?" The tavern owner was furious and just slammed down the receiver and went back to sleep. A few minutes later he was aroused by the telephone's ring. Again the same inebriated voice asked, "What time do you open up in the morning?" "Listen," said the tavern owner, "there is no use in asking me what time I open, because I wouldn't let a man in your condition into my place!" Whereupon the caller replied, "I don't want to get *in*. I want to get *out*."

It's like that with some Christians when they find out what Jesus demands of their lives: "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart." (Mt.22:37). They immediately decide that they want *out*. Following Jesus may not be easy and there will be a price to pay, but once we reach "heaven" the benefits in following Jesus will be – eternal! Amen.