

## Keep Your Eye On The Path

June 27, 2010

Luke 9:51 – 62

<sup>51</sup>As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. <sup>52</sup>And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; <sup>53</sup>but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. <sup>54</sup>When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" <sup>55</sup>But Jesus turned and rebuked them, <sup>56</sup>and they went to another village.

<sup>57</sup>As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."

<sup>58</sup>Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

<sup>59</sup>He said to another man, "Follow me."

But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

<sup>60</sup>Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

<sup>61</sup> Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family."

<sup>62</sup>Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Let us Pray:

*Lord Merciful God, who has chosen your people for service unthinkable, hear our prayer today. You have called us to be a light unto darkness, hope to the hopeless and the advocate for those seeking justice in a lost and dying world, yet we have not kept our eyes on the path you have set laid out for us. Teach us today about reaction, responsibility and the promise you have given us; the promise that all you have required of us is as it should be. Instruction is sometimes hard to hear, especially when it requires of us more than we are willing to sacrifice. Remind us today that you ask no more of us than we are called and able to bear and remind us today that no sacrifice we make is ever as great as the one given by Christ on the Cross of Calvary. How often we forget that our call is not so much about us **doing something for you**, as it is that you are preparing to **do something through us**. Ready us today for that **something** and equip us to serve you today; in word, action and deed. May the mediations of our heart and the words of my lips be pleasing and honorable to you today. In Christ Wonderful and Holy Name, we pray. Amen!*

I'd like to begin this morning with an introduction given in the style of our favorite prime time senior, Sophia Petrillo who always had a distinct way of getting the attention of her listeners.

Picture it: Cincinnati, Ohio, 1985, reporters are all hovering over the Cincinnati Reds during Spring Training and it is a year full of possibilities. This is the year that Pete Rose was about to break Ty Cobb's all time hits record and the reporters were anxious to know what Pete himself had to say about it. One reporter blurted out, "Pete, you only need 78 hits to break the record. How many at-bats do you think you'll need to get the 78 hits?" Without hesitation, Pete just stared at the reporter and very matter-of-factly said, "78." The reporter yelled back, "Ah, come on Pete, you don't expect to get 78 hits in 78 at-bats do you?" Pete Rose calmly shared his philosophy with the crowd of reporters who were restlessly awaiting his reply to this seemingly boastful claim.

*"Every time I step up to the plate, I expect to get a hit! If I don't expect to get a hit, I have no right to step in the batter's box in the first place!" "If I go up hoping to get a hit," he continued, "then I probably don't have a prayer to get a hit. It is a positive expectation that has gotten me all of the hits in the first place."*

Pete, for all his faults and failure, made a choice to hustle, hit, and win. History records that, even with his shortcomings, he accomplished his goal because he kept his eyes on the path that had been laid out before him. He never looked back.

Now I know a baseball reference is certainly the last thing you'd expect out of your pastor this morning and for some of you is probably the last thing you wanted to hear. But I tell you all this not to impress you with the life story of Pete Rose, but rather to draw attention to our own lives and the importance we place on our own goals and expectations. Even many rap artists today, with their gang tattoos and history with drugs and violence give God some praise and glory when they accept their music awards in front of thousands of fans, but Pete here makes no mention of his Creator and offers no praise to the One who gave him his abilities to begin with. Where is God in all of this? Our scripture reading today is a segue of sorts from the ministry of Jesus to his journey to Jerusalem; the place where the people of this world will believe that they have accomplished their mission to rid their cities of this man called Jesus, but as we all know, it becomes much more than that. Jerusalem is a place where we learn one of the most important lessons about how God's plans are not always our plans and how God can take even the most seemingly tumultuous situations of our lives and use them for the Glory of the Kingdom. But I digress.

The first part of our reading today is often referred to as *Samaritan Opposition* and so we must stop and ask ourselves the question, why is this important? What is the deal with the Samaritans anyway? The gospel accounts in the New Testament speak periodically of a race of people called Samaritans. No effort is made by the gospel writers to cover up the historic enmity that had developed between this group and the Jewish people. John, the writer of the fourth gospel account, makes clear mention of this as he relates an encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman: “The Samaritan woman said to Him, ‘You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?’ (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)” (John 4:9)

In a later episode at the temple in Jerusalem, John records what becomes a hostile encounter between some Jews and Jesus. It is interesting to note the terms used by the Jews in their attack on Jesus: “The Jews answered Him, ‘Aren’t we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?’” (John 8:48) They could think of nothing worse to say about Jesus than to call Him a Samaritan.

Luke’s gospel this morning shows us that the feelings ran both ways:

*“As the time approached for Him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And He 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 for 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.” (Luke 9:51-56)*

The fact that Jesus and his disciples were headed to the city which lay at the heart of Judaism, that is the city of Jerusalem, was enough for the Samaritans to refuse them hospitality. Revealing their own sentiments, two of Jesus’ disciples had no qualms expressing a desire for the death of all the Samaritans in the village. (<http://davcarson.home.mindspring.com/Intertestamental//samaritan.htm>) How many of us have been shunned simply because of who people believe us to be without any real idea of who we really are? And so Jesus rebukes the disciples desire to call down fire from heaven on these people because Jesus knows that they are simply acting in a way that has become familiar and comfortable for them. In other words, they do not know any better and as the rest of our reading today will show it is not only the Samaritans who will shun them, but there are others. Their reaction should be instructive, not destructive as we come to see in the way that Jesus responds to those in the second part of our reading today.

There are three individuals who are mentioned in verses 57 to 62 who either lay claim to their own desire to follow Christ or are instructed by Jesus to do so. Each time Jesus instructs them with the harsh reality of what it truly means to follow him. And so as with any good lesson there must be something learned or the time has been in vain. What are we to gain from this instruction today?

First and foremost let us not forget that Jesus was fully man; sin laid aside. Jesus had feelings and the rejection of those he was trying to save would have been painful; the same sort of pain we ourselves have encountered time and time again on our own life's journey. But Jesus doesn't know what I am going through. He doesn't know what it means to be rejected because of love. Excuse me? Uh, but yes he does. That is what the whole message of Christ was all about; LOVE! For God so LOVED the world that he gave (John 3:16) . . . And so we know and rely on the LOVE God has for us. God is LOVE (1 John 4:16) . . . For the Lord LOVES the just and will not forsake his faithful ones (Psalm 37:28) . . . I LOVE those who LOVE me, and those who seek me find me (Proverbs 8:17), LOVE is patient, LOVE is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, [LOVE] is not proud (1 Corinthians 13:4). If there is anything that Jesus did understand then certainly it was love and the rejection that comes from those to whom it is offered.

How then should we deal with rejection as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ? Expect it. Those who rejected him will reject us as well, for the same reasons. Accept it. The joy that is set before you, acceptance by God, hearing the Father say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," is not worthy to be compared with the sufferings we undergo now. And, most importantly, respond to it as our Lord did, not with rejection in turn, but with love. Can we love those who reject us? Can we? No! But Christ has already done it and Christ in us can still do it. Never be ashamed to ask God to help you in doing so; the opportunity is certainly going to be presented. (Dr. Donald T. Williams, Trinity Fellowship, 1995)

Lastly let me speak to our sense of urgency today. There are many today who are sitting in services all across our country with one thing on their mind at this very moment. When do we eat? What time will I be getting home this afternoon so I can watch the big game or take a nap? What does this say about our sense of urgency today? Where is God in all of this? Is there any urgency for God's Kingdom today? Well, do we believe

that men and women are lost without Christ? Of about five billion people in the world, half of them have never even heard the name of Jesus, much less had the opportunity to hear a clear presentation of the Gospel. How shall they hear without a preacher? Of about 35,000 evangelical North American missionaries, 95 % of them work with about 17 % of the world's population. Could you have accepted Christ or grown in him without any access to a Bible? Of 3,000 known languages on the planet, only a little more than half have any Scripture at all, and only about 10 % have the whole Bible. I know you've heard these kinds of statistics before, and you have probably learned to roll your eyes at them. That's part of the problem. (Dr. Donald T. Williams, Trinity Fellowship, 1995)

Jesus makes two points here about the urgency of his work. First, it comes before everything else, even the highest human obligations (vs. 59-60). Second, it demands whole-souled, steadfast devotion (vs. 62). Interestingly, in this passage it is not the man who turns back who is unfit for the kingdom, but rather the man who merely looks back (like Lot's wife). What happens if you just look back when you are plowing? You plow a crooked row. (Dr. Donald T. Williams, Trinity Fellowship, 1995) This should be an interesting wake up call for many Christians today.

Listen, I am not saying that material possessions, a good meal amongst friends and an afternoon nap are not important. They are. What I am saying is that each of us has a mission before us, a path laid out for our lives and we have a responsibility to keep our eye on the path before us. Our sense of urgency today is based not on discipleship offered after all our comforts and needs have been met but rather as means to accomplish the goal that has been set out before us. Christ made his way to Jerusalem for us despite all of the rejection he faced and he did so with character and grace. Shouldn't we, with the help of Christ in our lives, be able to do the same for him? I urge each of you today to embrace life, to enjoy the world we live in but to also embrace the path that God has prepared for you and to follow it with character and with grace. Won't you prayerfully consider today where God has placed you, what God is asking of you and where your path is taking you today. Amen.