

*Gospel: Luke 9:51-62*

*51 When the days drew near for [Jesus] to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; 53 but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. 54 When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” 55 But he turned and rebuked them. 56 Then they went on to another village.*

*57 As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” 58 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.” 59 To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” 60 But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” 61 Another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” 62 Jesus said to him, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”*

Grace to you and peace from God, our Creator, and from our Crucified, Risen, and Ascended Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

When my son, Jason, was a baby, he and I were driving from Detroit to Columbus, Ohio. As we were driving just south of Toledo, I saw a tornado off in the distance. It was, of course, pretty frightening. I turned on the radio and they were saying to take cover. The tornado was traveling in our direction, but it didn't seem to be traveling as fast as I was. I wasn't sure exactly where to take cover, other than to get out of the car and lay down on the side of the road because there were no ditches. I think I was more afraid and felt more out of control because I had Jason, who was just a baby, with me. I kept driving and drove even faster.

When we got to the Perrysburg exit, there were police cars there that forced us off I-75 and into the parking lot of a Holiday Inn Express which was being used as a shelter. I got Jason out of his car seat and remember being terrified as I rushed in, along with a whole bunch of other people, into the hotel where they put us in a conference room that was in the center of the hotel.

As we were crowded in that conference room, I held Jason tight and he never made a peep. I still believe to this day that he could sense my fear and could sense that something just wasn't right.

I don't know how long we were the conference room exactly, but it seemed like a long time. We could hear a terrible storm raged outside, but we were safe inside. Eventually, they told us that it was safe for us to leave. I was so worn out from feeling afraid and out of control that I decided we would just spend the night at the hotel. A whole bunch of other people did, too, and they didn't have enough rooms for all of us. They asked if any of us were IHG members because they had to give rooms to those people first and luckily enough, I was, so Jason and I got the first room.

Now that was a terrifying experience. I didn't have control over the situation. No matter what I thought or did, I couldn't influence the tornado. I couldn't stop it. I couldn't change its direction or intensity. I don't like feeling out of control. Most – if not all of us – don't. We find the experience unsettling. Whether it is a storm, like I experienced, or an illness, or the death of a loved one, or a broken relationship, a false accusation, or a job loss, all those kinds of things remind us that we don't have control...and we don't usually like it.

That's the reason people work so hard to keep control of the things in their lives. It's the reason people work so hard to keep control of the power that they think they have.

If we think about this week's gospel, it explains some of the reactions to Jesus' journey to the cross.

Pastor David Lose points out that there are different reactions.

The first is that of the Samaritans. The Samaritans recognize that Jesus has set his face to go to Jerusalem and so they will not receive him. They know that Jesus is on a mission and they just don't want to have anything to do with it. Or maybe they think that because Jesus is on this mission, he won't have time for them, no time to teach them or to heal them or to do whatever they want him to do. Whichever it is, when they realize Jesus is on this mission...he has set his face to go to Jerusalem...they reject him.

The disciples react to this rejection in a bit of a surprising way. They want to call down fire from heaven to burn up the Samaritans. Now, Jews and Samaritans didn't necessarily get along, but this is pretty extreme. If the Samaritans are going to get in Jesus' way, the disciples want to get rid of them. We can do some pretty crazy things when we feel out of control!

Others want to follow Jesus, but they have some things they need to do first. They have to bury loved ones or go home and say goodbye first. And you can't really blame them. Those are totally reasonable requests. But Jesus speaks in hyperbole and exaggeration to make a point. He says, "Let go of the past." "Drop everything and follow me." What Jesus is doing, in making his way to Jerusalem, is making a difference. And anyone who can't see that doesn't have what it takes to be a disciple.

The question for us this morning is this: Does Jesus make a noticeable difference in our lives?

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That can be a hard question for us to answer. And one of the reasons is that in order for that to happen, in order for Jesus to make a noticeable difference in our lives, we have to give up some control. And most of us don't like that.

We heard what Jesus says in this passage to those who wanted to follow him. His mission had to come first. They had to give up their plans. They had to let go of the past. They had to drop everything to follow him.

And here is the even harder thing. In order to follow Jesus, in order for Jesus to make a noticeable difference in our lives, we have to walk with Jesus in the midst of people and in the midst of a world that is sometimes out of control. Jesus doesn't promise that he will control it all...only that he will walk with us. Jesus will hold onto us through all the ups and downs and will bring us in time to the other side.

Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem not just with us, but also for us. While we were yet sinners, Jesus died on the cross and rose to new life so that we might share that new life, that we might put on Christ, here and now, and for all eternity. We who have been baptized, put on Christ, we are given a new identity, Child of God, and

we are called to live out that identity by following in the ways of Jesus. That means serving as Jesus served, forgiving as Jesus forgives, loving as Jesus loves.

On the night of his betrayal, Jesus washed his disciples' feet. He said that he had set them an example. It was an example of loving service. And he call us to serve others in love as well. Sometimes it is chaotic, difficult, disturbing, even out of control, but Jesus walks with us. In fact, when we serve others in Jesus' name, we are serving him.

And when we fall short, all we can do is give thanks that Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem not just with us but for us, that Jesus took on our chaotic and turbulent lives, died and rose, and there is nothing that separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus. Not storm. Not illness. Not the death of a loved one. Not a broken relationship. Not a false accusation. Not a job loss. Nothing in all creation. Not chaos. Not being out of control. Not even ourselves.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.