

“Seize the Day”**Luke 9:51-62****The Rev. Dn. Nancy Casey Fulton****June 30, 2019**

*May my words be a lamp to our feet
and a light to our path.*

While Sister Diane and I were greeting the congregation after last Sunday's service, we learned that there was a man outside the church who had no food and no money to buy any food, as a roommate had stolen his stash

I did not respond

I was focused on my exhaustion and my desire to head home and take care of domestic responsibilities

Sister Diane wisely suggested we ask Sally or Sharon to handle the situation, and within a few minutes Sharon said all was taken care of

PAUSE

But a week later I am still thinking about my reluctance to help

I understand that delegating tasks is a good way to manage problems:

My head tells me that I don't have to do everything myself if I am to earn my wings in the kingdom of God

PAUSE

But my heart tells me something else entirely

In today's Gospel we encounter Jesus and his disciples in a similar dilemma

Jesus, his work on earth nearly finished, is sending some his disciples ahead to arrange lodging and food for their journey to Jerusalem

Luke says: "When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.

. . . As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." 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."

To another he said, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Luke is clear and to the point in portraying the impatience Jesus must have felt when his followers dragged their feet, insisting they take care of worldly affairs before they follow Jesus to Samaria, to Jerusalem, or to somewhere he had not yet named.

PAUSE

This conversation is not a new one in the history of the Hebrew people

- In First Kings, the Lord sends Elijah to anoint Hazael as king

Elijah sets off with enthusiasm, but he soon encounters Elisha, son of Shaphat, (Shay fat) who is plowing his fields

Elijah throws his mantle over Elisha, a sign that he is calling Elisha to follow him

But Elisha, like the disciples in today's Gospel, says, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." Elijah—annoyed—replies: "Go back again; for what have I done to you?" And Elisha slaughters some oxen, prepares a meal for his family, and sets out to follow Elijah

PAUSE

In the Letter to the Galatians, Paul writes that "for freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery"

He warns them not to use their freedom in the name of Jesus as an opportunity for self-indulgence, "but through love become slaves to one another"

PAUSE

Both Elijah and Paul speak with patience as they urge their followers to put the Kingdom of God first

On the other hand, in the Gospel of Luke Jesus snaps at his followers because they place family before the Kingdom of God

He says to them: "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God"

Is this the same Jesus who preached love? Or is this the thinking of Luke, who is impatient for the coming of the kingdom, who is afraid that the followers of Jesus will lack the grit to carry on his work

perhaps Luke believes that unflinching obedience to the teachings of Jesus and his followers will bind together these young followers of “the Way”

Given the state of their world, the evangelist perhaps fears that the whole saga of Jesus and the disciples will fall apart when Jesus leaves them

PAUSE

Today, more than 2,000 years after Jesus ascended into heaven, we don't feel the urgency that must have underscored all that the disciples did in Galilee

But we do feel the urgency in Paul's letter to the Galatians: he reminds his readers that Christ has set them free, that they should “stand firm” and not submit to the yoke of slavery as the Israelites did under the rule of the Roman Empire

instead, they are to embrace with courage the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control

we too are called to live by these fruits: to be gentle, unhurried, thoughtful

the Spirit will be with us, not scolding, but teaching, comforting, and inspiring us to follow the ancient words of Jesus and his followers

PAUSE

For three centuries, Christians in the early Church struggled to survive in a culture hostile to them

For three centuries they fought hard to shape their fledgling church with the teachings handed down to them by Jesus; by the writers of the Gospels; and by the many letters sent to the scattered churches

Despite their desire to shape a cohesive church, one under their control, it must have been a relief to the early members of “the way” when the Council of Nicea cobbled together the Nicene Creed, giving the citizens of the Holy Roman Empire a clear vision of what it was to be a Christian

. . . a relief to look to the establishment, to the Emperor Constantine, for protection and legitimacy

PAUSE

we live in another time, 1,964 years from the absorption of Christianity into the rule of politicians

. . . and even longer from the time when Luke tried to shepherd the disciples in the way that he believed Jesus would approve

We can see now why Jesus might have been impatient with his disciples in those last days before his Ascension, for we have the history of Christianity laid out before us. . .

. . . we understand that the early Church needed to move fast if it was going to survive as a people of God

we are less likely to fear the changes it has undergone, and perhaps more optimistic for what the future might bring

and yet we, like the disciples, often allow our domestic and worldly commitments to dominate our thinking

so often we turn our backs on Jesus. . .

. . . forgetting the opening words to our psalm:

*I will cry aloud to God;
I will cry aloud, and God will hear me.*

. . . or the closing verse of Gene Peterson's translation of Psalm 16: "No procrastination. No backward looks. You can't put God's kingdom off till tomorrow. Seize the day."