

Proper 8C
June 27, 2010
The Rev. Gene B. Manning
Luke 9:51-62

As some of you know

I have been away for the last three weeks
with young folks.

My first destination was to Amistad in Bolivia.

It was an amazing journey
with 9 youth and 3 adult chaperones.

We worked around Kantuta House
and played with our friends there.

The second was to Hendersonville, North Carolina,

for Kanuga's Junior Young People's Conference
where I journeyed for a week
with 65 middle-schoolers

and 20 college aged staff members.

It is good to be home,

to the familiar and the comfortable.

We have all heard that popular saying,

"It's not the destination in life;
it's the journey that matters."

Well....sort of,

but not exactly.

Yes, the journey is of great import.

It is how we live out our calling.

It is what we do with the life
we have been given.

But as Christians

the journey in life

must be navigated by,

oriented toward

our Lord's ultimate destination.

Without **that** destination in sight

we aimlessly wander about

looking for direction.

Without **that** destination in sight

it is all but impossible to orient ourselves,

to set our compass correctly.

Keeping the destination in front of us

is not always so easy.

It takes prayer, commitment, community,

and a whole lot of God's grace.

Even then we lose sight from time to time.

It is a comfort to know
 there were times when Jesus' disciples
 would have preferred to wander aimlessly about.
 Times when they wondered if it would be easier
 to turn back....to reorient to their old lives.
 We know there were times they lost sight.

It was not and it is not an easy journey
 to be a disciple of Christ,
 but it is one upon which our very lives depend.

This morning we meet Jesus
 "as he sets his face to go to Jerusalem."
 The stakes get higher
 for the disciples.
 They are asked to leave
 the comfortable behind.

The road becomes more difficult
 as Jesus sees his destination
 on the horizon.

He and his disciples
 are at a turning point in their life together.
 They have been moving about in Galilee
 with relative ease.
 After all it is familiar terrain for them.
 It is home of sorts.

It is the place where they have raised their families,
 mastered their trades,
 and built small businesses.

Jesus has drawn great crowds
 as they have gone to the towns and villages
 that surround the Sea of Galilee.

He is easily recognized as Mary's son.
 A comfort to some,
 a scandal to others.
 He has been acknowledged
 as a teacher
 and a healer.
 A miracle worker to some.
 A heretic to others.

Now it is time
 to head south to the Holy City,
 to the centerpiece of the Jewish world.
 It is time to share God's redemptive purpose
 with the holy people of Jerusalem.

God is beckoning his Son
 and Jesus sets his compass
 in faithful obedience.

Jesus knows this will not be an easy trip.

He has much to tell his disciples along the way
and there is a limited amount of time
to prepare them for the days ahead
and for the events that will soon unfold.

There is a limited amount of time
to prepare them for life beyond Calvary
when it will be up to them
to tell the world
about God's saving deed through Jesus.

He has already tried to explain
he will be betrayed into human hands.

But such words have not sunken in,
not taken hold.

How can they?
This is their Lord and Master.
He is their only hope
against the ways of the world.

With his bidding they set out.

He sends a few on ahead of him.
It will take a good four or five days
to get up to Jerusalem.
This 60-mile trip is treacherous
and filled with danger.

Jesus and his followers must pass through Samaria,
the country that separates Galilee in the north
from Jerusalem in the south.

Its unfriendly and even hostile territory
for folks from Galilee.

There is history here,
several hundred years
of bad blood between them.
They neither like nor trust one another.

The Samaritans are not "their" people.

They have no synagogue or temple.
They are "outsiders," strangers.
But to reach their destination
the disciples must pass through the midst of them.

And as Luke tells us

the Samaritans want nothing to do with Jesus.
James and John flex their muscles
and want to show them a thing or two
by reigning down fire from above.

Jesus once again must set the disciples straight.

He reminds them
retaliation has no place in God's kingdom.

God's people are called to love
even their enemies.
Jesus uses this traveling time
to tell stories to prepare his disciples
to take the ordinary and every day events
of their lives
into conscious awareness
and participation in the Kingdom life.

He wants them to know their lives
must be changed
from the inside out
if they are to follow him the rest of the way.
Changed in the depths of heart and soul.

Three bold travelers
are quick to tell Jesus they understand,
they get it.
'Of course, we will follow where you lead.
Follow that is...
with conditions.'

They get more than they bargain for.
It is time for some intensive discipleship training,
the advanced directives.

Jesus wants them to know that they too
must set their faces toward Jerusalem
and by so doing
life will be different.
Priorities will shift.
Direction will be re-oriented.

Jesus uses vivid language
to jolt the disciples and us
from our staid way of ordering things
and to see things from a new angle.
An angle that places the cross in the foreground.

I don't know about you
but I find these instructions from our Lord
uncomfortable,
challenging,
and all but impossible.

I never want to linger very long here
on this part of the journey with Jesus
and these three inquisitive followers.
Chances are I would have taken a detour that day.
But that would be the very moment
I would lose sight of the destination.

The 3 come to him one by one.
With all sincerity, they promise to follow.

Jesus tells the first that this road of discipleship
is not always going to be comfortable.
‘You may wonder at times
where you are to lay your head.
We will not be staying in any 5 star hotels.’

Jesus tells the next one,
‘God must come first.
Your own business is secondary to the Gospel.’
And to the third, he says,
‘The time to follow is now, this moment
not at a later date when it is convenient.’

We are called to no less.
We are to orient ourselves fully to God’s will
and to set **our** faces toward Jerusalem.
Because when we do,
we see something we might have overlooked.

Our Lord’s destination does not end at the cross.
It goes through the cross
to the new life that is beyond,
to the resurrection given each of us.

There were several times
over these last three weeks
I longed for the comforts and familiarity of home,
when I needed to re-orient
because I lost sight of the destination.

And then through God’s grace
and through the gathered community
I would catch a glimpse
of the risen Christ in my midst
and I would be nudged back
onto the road.

All of us are called to follow,
to travel that sometimes difficult
road with our Lord.

Whether you are called
to feed the hungry,
comfort the sick,
care for the environment,
visit the prisoner,
teach our children,
pray for the suffering,
welcome the outsider

do it all with your face set toward Jerusalem
for there you will see the love of God
reminding each of us that we never travel alone.