

“Walk By The Spirit”

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Galatians 5:1,13-25

Luke 9:51-62

And [Jesus] sent messengers ahead of him,

who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him;

but the people would not receive him,

because his face was set toward Jerusalem.

Luke 9:52-53

Let us pray... O God,

Amen

Our reading today from the Gospel of Luke is about the beginning of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem – on foot!

Can you imagine how people back then – if they wanted to go anywhere, had to go everywhere on foot.

I know of a senior woman who walked 6 miles a day.

She's 90 now – and nobody knows where she is!

Too bad nobody was paying attention – I mean, to my joke...

So, Jesus sets out on his journey and we are provided with another lesson about ancient hospitality– but through another bad example!

Jesus had “set his face” to go to Jerusalem – to “set his face” is an unusual expression which implies Jesus had committed himself to go to Jerusalem;

He had decided to confront the powers at Jerusalem.

We can only speculate what this meant to the people of Samaria –

and why they seemed to have taken offense that Jesus

had ‘set his face to go to Jerusalem’.

Perhaps it was because of the age-old tension between

the Jews and Samaritans of that time, who disagreed about sacred geography.

Where was the proper place to worship God? Which was holier:

The mountain shrines of northern Israel or the City of Jerusalem in Judea?

Jesus was about to send out more than seventy missionaries ahead of him – which suggests he had quite a large entourage with him.

So, the Samaritans would very likely be scandalized at the prospect of hosting this march to Jerusalem, celebrating the high holy days of Passover.

As far as the Samaritans of that town were concerned,

they were not supportive of this, so there would be no discussion,

no compromise – and no entry.

Willard, p.2

The disciples were likewise scandalized by this gross disrespect – especially to the one they now called the ‘Lord’ –

and the word ‘Lord’ serves as a substitute for God’s name
Jewish people say “Adonai” or “Lord” instead of saying the name aloud out of their great respect for God.

James and John were so upset at this that they came up to Jesus and asked,
"Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them?" [Luke 9:54^b]

But it appears that Jesus himself was scandalized – but by his own disciples, when he turns on them and says,

"You do not know what manner of spirit you are of; for the Son of man came not to destroy [human] lives but to save them."

While rebuking his disciples, Jesus was making a strong statement against violence as we should expect of the Prince of Peace.

In this narrative, we see him capable of great emotion – rage even, but as a mature person who expresses his passion in a measured way.

In the Gospel stories, Jesus’ ferocity is reserved for evil spirits, but that also includes the spirits of ignorance and depraved indifference...

People are important to Jesus – and this implies that people are important to God who wants us to have empathy for one another – even our enemies.

That is one of the main lessons of the Book of Jonah, as God uses all of Creation to get Jonah’s attention and get him to care about the thousands of people in Nineveh who don’t know their right hand from their left – who just don’t know what they are doing...

This quality of empathy is evident in the name of God;

God told Moses that God’s name was “I Am”. “I Am That I Am”.

That is as if God is saying to us, “I am that ‘I am’ that you are, too.”

Just as we are created in God’s image, like God, we can say, “I am”.

Identifying with God in this way could lead to legitimizing all kinds of social, political, and religious causes – as well as all kinds of bad behavior like slavery and terrorism.

Instead, let us consider how identification with God is about the value that God places on human dignity and self-worth.

Building on my message from last week – that God has a face through Jesus Christ, when we put a ‘human face’ on a situation we find empathy, allowing us to identify with someone in a given situation.

To have a face is part of having an identity and when we put a face on a situation and see ourselves in someone else’s predicament, that identification with their identity can lead to unity.

Willard, p.3

Just as a person's face symbolizes their identity,

a person's character demonstrates who they are by what they do.

A person's character goes deeper than superficial appearance – like skin color;

So, just as Martin Luther King said, in words to this effect,

it is appropriate to judge someone on the 'content of their character' rather than their appearance, affiliation, or orientation.

Just as God has a face through Jesus Christ,

so the character of God is demonstrated through the words and deeds of Jesus.

Just as the Holy Spirit of God is active in human hearts and minds,

so the character of God is demonstrated through inspiration.

Just as God created the heavens and the Earth,

so the character of God is demonstrated in the interdependence of nature throughout the Universe.

Jesus said to his disciples – and still says to us,

“Don't you know what Spirit you are of?”

The character of God is described in our lesson from Galatians today

where the Apostle Paul outlines those qualities which are in opposition

as well those which are consistent with the Spirit – or character of God.

Those behaviors that are not consistent with the Spirit of God –

as listed in the Common English Version with some editing by me, are as follows...

sexual immorality [such as rape], moral corruption,

doing whatever feels good [at the expense of others' rights to do so],

²⁰*idolatry, drug use and casting spells, hate, fighting, obsession,*

losing your temper, competitive opposition, conflict,

selfishness, group rivalry,

²¹*jealousy, drunkenness, [riotous] partying, and other things like that.*

On the other hand, those behaviors which reflect the character of God, include:

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

gentleness, and self-control.

These are the fruits of the Spirit –

the harvest that comes from cultivating the character of God within oneself,

which takes away nothing from who we are as individuals,

but rather seeks to bring out the best in who we are.

So, this alignment with the characteristics of God are not meant as conformity

but more like liberation to become who you were created to be in God's image:

loving and joyful – as in passionate,

peaceful and kind – as in rational and practical,

good and faithful – as in righteous and courageous,

and gentle – as in strong enough to show mercy.

Willard, p.4

There is a difference between the world's bravado
that has the appearance of cleverness and strength;
And then there is the "beau courage" – the good courage
that comes from God.

Good courage is needed to follow Christ.

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus confronted those who
wanted to join the procession – but really didn't understand,
like many these days who call themselves, 'Christians';
Jesus said,

"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests;

but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head."

[Luke 9:58]

When family ties kept two candidates from following him,
Jesus treated each of them differently, getting them to recognize
they were being called into a relationship with God on a journey.

This requires looking to the future rather than being stuck in the past,
and not being bound by tribal prejudice and dead ideologies.

Jesus did allow that one fellow to go home to take care of his father's funeral,
while charging him to go out later to proclaim the Kingdom of God.

Jesus doesn't call us into conformity with someone else's idea
of what it means to be a Christian.

We are called to come to terms with ourselves, to face who we are
and to bear the cross – the unique cross that has been given to each us to bear.

"Don't you know what Spirit you are of?"

The LGBTQ community was uniquely challenged just weeks ago
when 49 people were murdered and 53 were wounded at a gay nightclub
in Orlando called Pulse.

They were mostly gay and Hispanic and one of the terrible ironies of this tragedy
was the untimely revelation to traditional families who learned
for the first time, that their son or daughter, brother or sister was gay.

The gay community carried the cross for American society and the world
in the early days of the AIDS crisis in the 1970s and 1980s
when hospitals were afraid to accept gay people afflicted with AIDS.

Gay people pushed for the government to recognize the crisis and do research;
They manned testing sites; and they got results in transforming society.

Maybe it will take the LGBTQ community to do the same thing,
fight the same fight, regarding gun control and

like the Jewish stand against holocaust, say, "Never again!"

It takes putting a human face on this situation and challenging others to change,
by saying, "Don't you know what Spirit you are of?"

Willard, p.5

I believe that to be open and affirming
is what it means to be born again?

To be open to who you are and affirm your identity,
is to be open to the Christ within and affirm your kinship with humanity.

There is a beautiful story from the Iroquois tradition
about personal salvation and social transformation.

The Peacemaker of the Iroquois was of the same Spirit as Jesus
though he had a different mission – like Gandhi and King and Mother Teresa.

The Peacemaker entered a time of perpetual war in what is now upstate New York
and his first convert was a woman in the land of the Seneca, near Buffalo.

Her name was Jigonhsassee, Peace Woman, and she provided him shelter
as he made his journey toward the sunrise.

She warned him there was danger on the way ahead because of a terrible cannibal
who lived in the land of the Onondaga.

The Peacemaker said to her,

“This is why I have come into the world: To put such evils to an end.”

So he continued his journey and he found the lodge of this cannibal;

The Peacemaker climbed up on the roof to look in through the smoke hole.

There he saw a man seated beside a great pot of a dreadful stew
set in the coals of the fire.

Then, the man looked into the pot to see if it was boiling yet

and at that moment he saw the reflection of the Peacemaker’s face.

He was startled and sat back in horror, saying,

“This is not the face of a cannibal!”

He immediately took the large pot out of his lodge and emptied its contents

by the upturned roots of a great tree; and he cried out into the wilderness,

“I am no longer the person that I was,

but I cannot undo nor forget the harm that I have caused!”

It was then that the Peacemaker appeared before him

with a deer on his shoulders which he then set before the man, saying,

“Come and eat. But first, cleanse your cooking pot and fill it with water,

but dip with the current, for you must never go against nature again!”

In this way, Ayonwatha – who is called Hiawatha, became converted

by the Peacemaker to become an apostle of the Good News of Peace & Power
to the People of the Longhouse called the Iroquois.

In this story, we can recognize allies of a common Spirit that longs

for that Beloved Community that is yet possible.

“Don’t you know what Spirit you are of?”

Amen

Our lesson today from Galatians 5:1,13-25 speaks of the character of Christians expressed as the fruit of the Holy Spirit – and of the character of God...

^{5:1} Christ has set us free for freedom.

Therefore, stand firm and don't submit to the bondage of slavery again.

¹³ You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters;

only don't let this freedom be an opportunity to indulge your selfish impulses,
but serve each other through love.

¹⁴ All the Law has been fulfilled in a single statement:

Love your neighbor as yourself.

¹⁵ But if you bite and devour each other,

be careful that you don't get eaten up by each other!

¹⁶ I say be guided by the Spirit and you won't carry out your selfish desires.

¹⁷ A person's selfish desires are set against the Spirit,

and the Spirit is set against one's selfish desires.

They are opposed to each other, so you shouldn't do whatever you want to do.

¹⁸ But if you are being led by the Spirit, you aren't under the Law.

¹⁹ The actions that are produced by selfish motives are obvious, since they include sexual immorality, moral corruption, doing whatever feels good,

²⁰ idolatry, drug use and casting spells, hate, fighting, obsession, losing your temper,
competitive opposition, conflict, selfishness, group rivalry,

²¹ jealousy, drunkenness, partying, and other things like that.

I warn you as I have already warned you,

that those who do these kinds of things won't inherit God's kingdom.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

²³ gentleness, and self-control.

There is no law against things like this.

²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the self with its passions and its desires.

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let's follow the Spirit.

Let us be challenged and guided by these words...

Luke 9:51-62

- [51] When the days drew near for him to be received up,
[Jesus] set his face to go to Jerusalem.
- [52] And he sent messengers ahead of him,
who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him;
- [53] but the people would not receive him,
because his face was set toward Jerusalem.
- [54] And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said,
"Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume
them?"
- [55] But he turned and rebuked them.
*["You do not know what manner of spirit you are of;
for the Son of man came not to destroy {human} lives but to save them"]*
- [56] And they went on to another village.
- [57] As they were going along the road, a man 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, let me first go and bury my father."
- [60] But he said to him,
"Leave the dead to 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 his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of
God."