

Sts. Stephen and Barnabas

Episcopal Church

35 West Second Street

Florence, New Jersey 08518

3 Pentecost: Proper 8 (C)

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DRAFT

“No delays”

The Gospel: Luke 9:51-62

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. 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?” But he turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village. 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 he said, “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.” 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.”

Dear Lord Jesus Christ help us keep looking ahead. Amen.

A story is told of the Civil War General George Steadman who was addressing his Confederate troops just before the battle of Second Manassas, also known as Bull Run. General Steadman apparently had a premonition as to how the battle was going to turn out. “Gentlemen,” he said to his troops, “I want you to fight vigorously and then run for your life. As I am a bit lame, I'm going to begin running now.” [General Steadman's commitment to his position as a general for his troops was weak at best!]

[Thanks to the Rev. Rosemary Brown,
http://day1.org/616-hide_and_seek]

As a teenager I cut the grass of my house which had a very large lawn, a mini-football field, and I did that enough that later I did not ever want to have a house with grass or at least with much grass! But I did know that as long as I could keep my eyes on some target ahead of me, and especially on the edge I had just cut in parallel with the street bounding my yard, I could mow a pretty straight line; but if I had instead looked

back at where I had gone while I was cutting, not only would the line of grass have been really crooked, I would have cut into a dozen or more trees and flowers, and a few big rocks! As my Dad constantly reminded me, “Watch where you’re going!” That is also very good and safe wisdom if one is driving! Nowadays one frequently needs to dodge someone walking on the sidewalk reading the screen of their smart phone. In fact a few weeks ago as my wife Jan was driving in, I counted about one in six drivers beside us who were texting as

they were driving; two years ago the ratio was one in sixteen, almost a three fold increase of texting while driving.

Scary! And deadly, by the way.

Distracted driving is one of the most common causes of traffic accidents.

Jesus seems to be seeing in various ‘inconveniences’ of ministry the way Satan often successfully manages to get our eyes off our prime mandate of bringing in God’s kingdom, the Jesus Movement, on earth as it is in heaven. We can find a huge variety of things that

just seem so much more important at the time. We have so many “ought's” in our lives that we miss the call God has given each believer to heed and to follow his beloved Son.

There is an old hymn that begins “Jesus calls us o’er the tumult”, and it speaks so well of how our busy lives can get in the way of our calling as Jesus’ twenty-first century apostles. We say, “I am a painter, not a minister.” I am a housewife, not an active follower of the Lord.” “I have so many urgent things on my plate already, how can I possibly be

in church every Sunday?” And so on and so on it goes.

Pastor Richard Johnson poses the question this way, “Are we admirers of Christ or his disciples?” Jesus did so many admirable things, ‘Attaboy, Jesus, go to it, but don’t mess with my life. I finally got my mortgage paid off, the kids are nearly through school, the car is out of the shop, and life is just beginning to be manageable.’ And Jesus happens to walk by and tell us, “OK, now is the time to follow me.”

As the late Pastor Grant Gallup expressed it, ‘We really don’t want to follow Jesus. We want Jesus to follow us.’

Excuses, excuses, excuses--we are adept at excusing ourselves from our prime directive as disciples of the One Lord. After all, there are so many things competing for our time, talent, and treasure. One theologian said the real problem with the Canaanites that Joshua faced in the Old Testament times was that the Canaanites worshiped their own economy and political system. If their

economy was good, then their political system must be good, and vice versa. If not, change the political system. Throw the old coots out and bring in the new deal, the better deal, the right deal. Then our retirement will be secure, and we won't have to worry. Sounds a little too close to home to me.

This gospel is indeed a hard word to live by.

Dean William Willimon of the Chapel of Duke University wrote, 'All excuses are a sign of insufficient commitment.'

O.C. Edwards, Jr., of Seabury

Western Seminary tells of an Oxford University student in the early nineteenth century that gave an excuse of why he could not be at the mandatory chapel service at 7:00 AM in the morning. The student said, “Unless I get to bed by four [AM], or five at the latest, I’m good for nothing the next day.”

We get so over-programmed with all our necessary work that we have little time to address our spiritual needs, our specific spiritual necessities to maintain the semblance of forgiving as we wish to

be forgiven, of loving as we want others to love us, of going the second mile, even for our enemies.

We want a plastic, malleable Jesus, a Jesus that we can bend and mold to our likeness.

However, in the end we will discover that we had only one life to give. And then we will wonder why we had not given it all to the Lord. A tip was just not good enough.

Pastor Millie Homing Peters of Hopedale, Illinois, asks, 'Is the church today inhospitable to Jesus?' What a

thought, that Jesus might not be so welcomed in our midst as presumed worshippers of him! And Pastor Millie goes further and postulates that people leave church not because of high demands but because of indifference. They simply find church too much of an inconvenience to be dealt with once or twice a month at most, especially when they are not challenged to lead the charge for Christ.

Seminary Professor Christine M. Smith says we value security, funerals, and farewells above all else.

Discipleship drops at best to a distant fourth.

If our lives have no goals, we are likely to reach them. In the story, “The Wizard of Oz”, the scarecrow asked Dorothy where she wanted to go. Dorothy replied, “I don’t know.” To which the scarecrow responded, “Then it doesn’t matter which direction you go, does it?” And legendary baseball star turned philosopher, Yogi Berra, said, “If we keep going in [the same] direction, we’ll end up where we’re headed.”

The question we need to ask ourselves is “Where exactly are we going?” Do we have any ultimate purpose in our life? Are we just floating along with the tides of time and chance? If so, we will sooner or later wash up on the same empty shore as everyone else with no direction in their lives.

Albert Schweitzer wrote, “The kingdom of God is untimely labor for the future.” In other words, if we do not ‘labor on’ now, the future will be incredibly bleak.

The farmer who plows his field by looking in the direction of where his plow has already passed will plow an extremely crooked and inefficient field. Instead Jesus urges us to look ahead, to the future of our work for the kingdom of God. Where do we want to go? What are our goals?

Someone observed a candle shop at the shrine at Fatima that sold candles for contrition for the penitent. One candle was at least a foot in diameter and six feet tall. Perhaps we all need to light

such a candle, a foot in diameter and six feet tall, and seek forgiveness for our own waywardness. But it is not candle lighting which delights our Savior. It is the turning of our hearts completely and finally toward him and his gospel which Jesus seeks.

Phillips Brooks, a Bishop of Massachusetts in the nineteenth century, said, “Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger! Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work shall not be a miracle. But you shall be a

miracle. And every day you shall wonder at yourself, at the richness of life which has come into you by the grace of God.”

May today we set our hearts and eyes and feet on the path that leads to our own Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem. And may we never turn back.

Amen.

Description:

Commitment versus delay becomes the challenge of daily life. Are we really committed to bring the love and forgiveness of Christ to the world, or is it too inconvenient? How can we turn our lives towards the work of God in our world? And, having sought and given forgiveness, will we respond to Christ's call to us with renewed vigor?

Tags:

Commitment, forgiveness, mercy, delay,
inconvenient, Albert Schweitzer,
Willimon, target, eyes, forward, looking,
Wizard of Oz, Oxford, admirers, Christ,
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