



June 27, 2010  
Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

*Priorities\**  
Rev. James Lamkin

**2 Kings 2:9-14; Galatians 5:1, 13-25; Luke 9:51-62**

**The most important thing in life to choose what is most important; and what is most important for Christians is to *seek an awareness of the life of God in the world and our place in it.***

Let us use the mirror of scripture to look at our own lives and attend to that which is most important

The text says "the people did not receive Jesus because his face was set toward Jerusalem."

What does that mean? How did the face of Jesus reveal that he was "set toward Jerusalem?"

While you ponder Jesus' face, ponder this: all week long about 20 of us Northside Drivers took our faces, our all-white faces, to Taliaferro County, GA, which, for the most part is occupied by few all-white faces.

There are some exceptions to these demographics, like the oddly new 96 acre housing community of stargazers. That's right, Deerlick Astronomy Village also is in Taliaferro County; and each home has a small observatory in the backyard in one of the least populated areas in the whole Southeast. Co-founder of the village, Chris Hetlage, describes the subdivision as like having "a lake house for geeks," he said as he tromped through the darkness toward his observatory.

We Northside Drivers also went to an observatory, a school, but mainly we were observed. The kids, the beautiful kids, watched us and seemed to notice everything: what we wore, when we wore it, how we talked, what we said, how we acted, and how we pronounced or mispronounced their names that were a challenge.

But we brought what we had. And what we had was ourselves, our belief that a small seed of faith planted in hope is something we trust to God, and the gifts of love and care are their own reward. Part of the joy was the determination I saw on the group's faces. In the words of the text, they had set their faces toward Taliaferro.

It's not that any of the mission group acted a lot like Jesus—especially at the end of a long day. But it was something good, something important and something faithful needed to happen to us who went and to those kids with whom we went to be among—that could only happen together. Face to face in a place that for most of the world is on the backside of nowhere—though the Taliaferro astronomers know it is nestled not far from the Virgo Cluster and only a few light years from Alpha Centauri; and it is close to the heart of God and our hearts.

And Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem. **It is most important in life to choose what is most important; and what is most important for Christians is to seek an awareness of the life of God in the world and our place in it.**

I don't know what it means that Jesus had his face set toward Jerusalem. It could just be a contrasting statement between Jesus the Jew and the Samaritans the non-Jews among whom he went. Samaritans looked to Mt. Gerizem as holy; Jews faced Jerusalem.

But the way the Gospel writer Luke tells the story, Jesus was able to look at life through the bifocal lenses of love. And his love could see both the eventual and the obvious. Both the big-picture of distant destiny, as well as the up-close beggar at the side of the road.

The setting for this story is the West Bank. The area of Samaria. And yes, then, as now, the question of who is in and who is out, who is excluded and who is included remains. There was no 20 foot tall wall here. But there was a wall. For generations there had been a wall. There still is. And waves of grief still emanate like in the flotilla tragedy. With reaction and over-reaction cycle that seems to be deep in the soil.

Jesus sends two disciples through a check-point. Good or bad, it seems that he picked the group's two hotheads, James and John, nicknamed Sons of Thunder to recon the place. Whether it was ethnicity or accent, or whether something was said or not said, the gate was closed and Jesus was not welcome.

James and John know their Bible; they are ready to pull an Elijah on these rascals. In other words, there nothing that a good wheelbarrow load of God's fire and brimstone can't fix. "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" The answer is simple: when in doubt, Nuke 'em.

Like an advocate of capital punishment said the other day, "Without the death penalty, how will they ever learn?" Right.

Well, they get rebuked...not the Samaritans, but James and John by Jesus! In your Bibles is a footnoted verse that is left out...

"Jesus rebuked them and said, "You do not know what spirit you are of, for the Son of Man has not come to destroy the lives of human beings but to save them."

Rather than wrath, Jesus walks away, and lets those to want to walk away do the same.

And not everybody wanted to be in Jesus' church. There is a telling text in John's gospel of a bunch of the disciples that were disappointed in Jesus and offended by Jesus and left. The trip they were taking was not the one they packed for. And like Jesus does with the Rich Young Ruler, he does not chase, he does not cajole, he does not water-down...he lets them walk away. In a painfully, unusually graphic moment, the gospel writer in John 6 allows us to catch a glimpse of Jesus' face. His face is not set toward Jerusalem. His face seems downcast as he looks at the remnant of his church, the disciples, and asks plaintively, "will you too walk away?"

Then it gets worse. The way Luke tells the story, a triptych of would-be followers comes up alongside Jesus. Each actually wants to follow him. I would have said, come on board, get in line, fall in, get in step Uno, Dos, Trace, Quattro.

Jesus does not. The birds of the air have their nests, foxes have holes, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. In other words, this journey will be different than the one you packed for. The second has a reasonable request...to go bury his father; and the third wants to say good-bye. To each Jesus consistently points to the gravity of the most important: the realm of God.

Perhaps these statements are in hyperbole. Or perhaps there are specific incidents behind the stories that Luke's congregation knows...like Joel who never came back from dad's funeral, or Rachel who went home to pack and found her enmeshment with her family so great, she never did reach escape velocity. Don't know. But we do hear in Jesus' words his focus of vision. We see where his face is singularly set.

So what do we do with this? And how does this description of Jesus, and Jesus description of discipleship connect with us? Well, two ways:

First, we can give thanks for what this says about Jesus. Truly, Jesus is the revealer of God here—God's relentless desire to go the distance and allow God's own broken-heart to become the chalice, the crucible of redemptive hope that hold's the world's brokenness. This is what Christian theology says God did through Jesus; and through that focused lens of love, we see God.. and we give thanks that Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem.

But we are not Jesus. We don't have that mission. I don't have that kind of stamina. I may as well go up against John Isner at Wimbledon. The match only took 11 hours. They only sprinted 28 miles in the process. I am "not fit."

Second, why don't we take Jesus' example, and though we may not have that kind of clarity, pray for it. pray for a theology of triage for what is most important.

Do as Elisha did and be bold in your request. Ask for a double blessing; maybe a clearer awareness of how God is present in the world. And until the clarity comes, have the fruit of the spirit as your to do list: kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, patience humility. Pray for a theology of triage, and ethical choices based on your awareness of God's life in the world and your part in it.

How about praying that prayer every morning: God help me triage my life today. May my ethics match my awareness of your life in the world and my part in it.

All week in Taliaferro County, Virginia Gilbert and I did the story time. Moses story. In the river, at the burning bush, before Pharaoh, on the mountain. It was half biblical interpretation, and have improvisation. Virginia laced the story of Moses into the story of Moses. For these

children knew of another Moses. The engineer and conductor of the Underground Railroad. Her real name was Harriet Tubman. Code name: MOSES. She was leading her people out of slavery into the Promised Land alright, Not Canaan, but Canada.

This week, you and I won't die for our faith like Jesus. We won't meander around a wilderness in leather sandals like Moses.

We won't challenge Baal worshippers to a grudge match like Elijah; and we won't run an espionage service that rides on the rail of the underground freedom train risking life and limb at every lantern shined in the darkness. But we will thank God for that way of life Christ lived; and we will triage our lives; and prioritize our priorities.

**For it is most important in life to choose what is most important; and what is most important for Christians is to *seek an awareness of the life of God in the world and our place in it.***

\*These are some of the notes James Lamkin used while preaching Sunday morning's sermon.