

There are places on a map that are important – places where we turn. If you are going to Acadia National Park – driving up I-95 – you will come to an exit at Bangor, Maine. That exit is for highway 1 – A and it will take you down to Mount Desert Island and Acadia National Park.

I was to meet my friend in Decatur for lunch. He said, “Just come on Highway 69. At the McDonalds turn right and the Chinese restaurant is on your left.”

Places on a map. We turn to go in a certain direction.

There are also places in our soul where we turn – we take a certain direction. That is true in our text in Luke for today. Jesus turned. He could have gone to Galilee – a place of simple people, a place of safety, a place of home, where he had spent most of his early life.

But Jesus turns to go to Jerusalem. Jerusalem – the word means peace. But it would not be a place of peace for Jesus. It would be a place of conflict, blood and death.

Galilee – Home. Jerusalem – a storm.

Jesus turns to go to Jerusalem.

The King James Version of the bible translates verse 51 “And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to Jerusalem.” The Greek idiom in the gospel here is “Jesus made his face into hard flint to go to Jerusalem.”

Galilee – Nazareth – a village close to the Sea of Galilee. Surely there are people there to be healed, scripture to be taught, little children to bless – settle in, settle down in Galilee.

But Jesus turns to go to Jerusalem. It is a time of turning in his soul.

The gospel of Mark says that when Jesus decides to turn and go to Jerusalem his disciples are amazed. Last time they were there - big trouble. It is Thomas, the disciple that scripture has labeled “the doubter” who says “Let us go that we might die with him.” I don’t believe that Jesus knew he was going to Jerusalem to die. I do believe that he knew he was going into a storm, into great conflict with the religious powers of the day and that death was a possibility.

Why do we come to worship? We could name many reasons today. One reason we come to church, to worship is for peace, for calming of our nerves. We are busy people – tension in our workplace and at home – in our broader world.

We come to this place to be calm.

We come to the music.

We come to the ritual of worship.

We come to the fellowship.

We come to find help in settling down, to be at peace.

Sometimes that is all I want out of worship. I remember the words of Jesus – “Come to me you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” That reason to come to worship is not the point of our text today. It is not the reason that Jesus turns to go to Jerusalem. At Jerusalem, there will be anger, overturning of the tables of the money changers in the temple. There will be agony in Gethsemane over the coming confrontation with the leaders of religion of the day.

Biologists tell us that our strongest drive at birth is self-preservation. But if we are fortunate, as we grow and other lives touch ours, we come to a word that replaces self preservation. That word is love.

I read a newspaper account – two men were walking down a stair well. One of them flung the lighted end of a cigarette into what he thought was a bucket of water. It was gasoline and there was a great

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burst of flames. One of the workers instinctively fled down the stairs to safety. The other worker, just as instinctively, fled up the stairs to warn fellow workers on the floor above the fire.

Which takes over in our life – when we come to that turning point: our downstairs self or our upstairs self or our Galilee self or our Jerusalem self?

Sometimes life is a matter of finding peace and joy. Today's text reminds us that there are times that the gospel leads us on a narrow, different path. On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus enters a village. Someone says, "Master I will follow you anywhere you go. But first let me go home and say farewell to those at my home. Let me go bury my mother and father." The asking here is not a matter of burying someone already dead. It is an asking of time. "I want to follow you, but I need to take care of my folks till they die, then I'll come and follow you- where ever you go."

Jesus points out that discipleship is not a matter of convenience.

Discipleship is like that place on a map – that place where we turn. Discipleship is a turning of our soul, our being. It is a turning toward replacing self with love for our neighbor.