

COMMITMENT BRINGS INVOLVEMENT

Luke 9: 51-62 June 27, 2010

Pilgrim Bud Precise

Do you know the meaning, “She is on a mission?” When a person is on a mission, it means that other issues are put on hold. This mission consumes all the time a person has to give. There is commitment, determination, sacrifice – this mission takes first place, it becomes top priority.

I believe this is the intent of the words in our text today, “Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem. Jesus is resolute, single minded – he is determined to go to Jerusalem. His ministry has been in Galilee. He has preached, taught, and worked miracles. Jesus seems to suddenly hear this silent clarion call to turn toward Jerusalem. And beginning with this text today, the rest of Luke’s gospel narrative describes his steadfast journey to Jerusalem. Jesus is on the move.

Though Jesus’ face is set to Jerusalem, he does not take the most direct route. In fact, there is almost no discernible logic to the collection of stories and incidents Luke relates, and there is no easy way to identify the route Jesus is following as he goes to Jerusalem. Luke is not concerned with geography. Luke is concerned with theology. The stories Luke shares reveal the character of Jesus, and, in turn, they reveal God who has sent him and the mission Jesus is to accomplish.

Two scenes occur in our text today. Both scenes occur almost immediately after Jesus was transfigured on the mountain top where he is in the presence of Elijah and Moses. Our first scene depicts Jesus’ rejection by a Samaritan village and it includes the righteous anger of James and John.

Before we think them overzealous, wanting to call down fire to consume the Samaritans, we probably need to remember that Elijah twice called down fire to consume opponents. Maybe this seeing Elijah reminded them of Elijah’s enthusiasm in dealing with opponents. But Jesus refuses. Just a few verses earlier in Luke, Jesus has told his followers to receive hospitality where it is offered, and if it was refused, to shake the dust off their sandals and move on.

But vengeance, violence – well it is not a part of the mission of Jesus. Luke does not give a reason as to why the Samaritans would not receive Jesus. It doesn’t seem to matter to Jesus if they are angry because he will not stay and perform miracles, or because he is not the Messiah they are looking for, or even if it is because he is traveling to the center of Judaism. What is important is not the rejection of the Samaritans, but rather Jesus’ resolve to go to Jerusalem.

We know about this “being on a mission” business. A child is sick, maybe even in the hospital. And sleep, meals, work – the daily routine takes a back seat. A person has a heart attack. Their mission is **clearly defined. We need a certain grade to get into graduate school. A friend is in trouble. The**

PILGRIM C H U R C H

An open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ

community is counting on us. We know about mission and setting our face in a certain direction. Our second scene in the text for today has to do with commitment, involvement. There is a series of encounters with several potential followers their sincerity and depth of faith is put to the test. "I will follow you wherever you go." Rather than Jesus replying with a simple, "Come along," Jesus answers, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. Following Jesus may mean you have no place to call home – either physically or culturally. Yes, serving God may take place right outside your front door. But it is not unreasonable to expect that a call to ministry will always be limited to a particular locale. And culturally, Christian values and service are not always politically correct or culturally popular. I have been in trouble several times for speaking out that it is not the place of the public school to teach our children how to pray or to teach a certain brand of religion. I have been in trouble with the Bishop for speaking out for racial inclusion. Our path of service is identified by the things we treasure, the priorities we set, and the way we treat others. You have done those things as much as I have.

The scene of the person who wanted to follow after he buried his Father and the one who wanted to bid farewell to his parents may involve the wanting of putting off ministry to a convenient time. The culture of that day was very accustomed to taking care of family. Is the would-be follower wanting to wait until his father dies, then he will be free to follow? Does bidding farewell mean that in time to come the person will follow? I don't believe that the Christian journey demands that we reject our responsibility

to family and vocations, but I do think it encourages us to see those needs in the light of our faith and through the deepening commitment to Christ. Commitment does mean involvement. And that involvement is not always at a convenient time and location. Sometimes that commitment means involving family more. Sometimes, it means that family has to do some adjusting. Last thing I want to do is speak for Janet Weidler, our full time pastor who will begin her work with us on September 1. But it is obvious to me that her working at Pilgrim and her husband working at his church in Hendersonville, NC, involves some thought about family and commitment. We will need to be sensitive to see that we do our part to help that arrangement work. And I believe it will.

In the movie, UNTOUCHABLES, one of the detectives working with Elliot Ness to remove the corruption of Al Capone from Chicago is shot. Elliot Ness comes and the detective has him bring the phone book. He finds the train schedule page and points out that the key witness is to be taken out of town on a certain train. The detective is dying. He shouts at Elliot Ness, as loudly as he can shout, "What are you prepared to do about it?"

We set out on this journey of faith. We find ourselves facing incidents, people, issues, resources and the question will surely come to us. "What are you prepared to do?" I think discipleship is like learning to swim. You learn to swim only when you get in the pool and work at it. We will learn our Christian commitment in our following Christ. And that commitment will bring involvement.

