

JUNE 30, 2013: THIRTEENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR
I Kings 19:16b, 19-21 Galatians 5:1, 13-18 Luke 9:51-62

Luke is famous for his "journey narratives." In both his gospel and his Acts of the Apostles, he almost always has someone "on the road." We're familiar with Joseph and Mary's trip to Bethlehem and Paul's three missionary journeys, but many of us don't even notice the first line of today's gospel pericope. "When the days for Jesus' being taken up were fulfilled, he resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem, and he sent messengers ahead of him." Between now and his chapter 19 entrance into Jerusalem, Luke's Jesus and his disciples are constantly on the road to the Holy City.

Luke's theology revolves around what happens to Jesus in Jerusalem. It's there he suffers, dies, rises, and sends the Holy Spirit. The evangelist believes all followers of Jesus are on the same journey. Throughout our lives, we're constantly suffering, dying, rising and receiving the Holy Spirit. We're daily on the road to our individual Jerusalems. That's why what happens to Jesus and his disciples during the next 10 chapters is so significant. Luke is showing his readers how, with the help of the Holy Spirit, they're to suffer and die in their quest to rise as other Christs.

As the journey begins, the evangelist reminds us to let nothing stop us from eventually arriving at our destination. Distractions will not be tolerated, especially from those who don't want us to be on the road to Jerusalem in the first place. James and John's suggestion on dealing with the inhospitable Samaritans demonstrates that Jesus' disciples should be known for their determination to finish the journey, not for seeking revenge on their enemies.

The faith-question is simple: are we committed enough to actually follow through on Jesus' demands? Though we might be willing to follow him "wherever (he) goes," are we able to imitate someone who "has nowhere to rest his head?" Might be a little rough having no shield from the "elements" of the world.

But even more demanding is Jesus' command to the prospective disciple, "Let the dead bury their dead!" Students of Scripture presume the man isn't on his way to a funeral home to arrange services for his recently deceased father. The request, "Let me go first and bury my father," simply implies his living father would object to his son's becoming a follower of Jesus. The man's basically asking Jesus to give him a "pass" on discipleship until his father dies, then, after he buries him, he'll join in proclaiming the kingdom of God.

Against all Jewish tradition - and even counter to Elijah's permitting Elisha to "go and kiss my father and mother goodbye" - Jesus doesn't give any of us such a pass. His call to become other Christs is immediate and total. He expects us to respond to it even in the face of opposition from those closest to us.

Paul saw his total commitment to the risen Jesus as the most freeing decision he ever made. That's why he couldn't understand why some in his Galatian community had gone back on that decision and decided to find salvation in keeping the 613 Laws of Moses. As a follower of Jesus, he was convinced only one law was necessary for truly free people: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Though a practicing Jew himself - a keeper of the 613 laws - the Apostle had discovered he didn't need Jesus' Spirit to maintain those specific regulations. The Holy Spirit only kicked in when you made the free choice to give yourself to others. After all, Jesus' Jerusalem journey wasn't to a geographical place, but to a relationship - with him and others.

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JULY 7, 2013: FOURTEENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR
Isaiah 66:10-14c Galatians 6:14-18 Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

Our sacred Christian authors will have more than a few problems if they ever overhear our Eucharistic greeting, "The Lord be with you." From today's gospel pericope it's clear the only greeting they expect to hear from a follower of Jesus is, "The Lord is with you."

We know from Jesus' first public words that his whole ministry revolves around proclaiming God's kingdom: the presence of God working effectively in our daily lives. So it shouldn't surprise us to discover when Luke's Jesus sends out his seventy-two apostles, they're to deliver the same message: "The kingdom of God is at hand for you."

Proclaiming God's presence is the primary task of all other Christs. Our lives should be centered on this message. Everything else is peripheral. "Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals, and greet no one along the way Stay in the same house and eat and drink what is offered to you" Failure is never an excuse to terminate our proclamation. Rejection simply provides an opportunity to proclaim God's presence to other people in other places. Yet, as Jesus emphatically states, just because someone refuses to recognize God's presence doesn't remove God's presence. "The kingdom of God is still at hand, even for those who refuse to acknowledge it."

Seeing things other people overlook is at the heart of our Scriptures, both Hebrew and Christian. In today's first reading, for instance, Third Isaiah sees something in the ruins of Jerusalem which most of his fellow Jews never notice. Once the prophet succeeds in getting his listeners to rebuild the Holy City, it will become a source of strength for all Israelites. "As nurslings you shall be carried in her arms, and fondled in her lap; as a mother comforts her child, so will she comfort you; in Jerusalem you shall find your comfort. When you see this, your heart shall rejoice ... And Yahweh's power shall be known to his servants."

Yet, as we know from Jesus' initial proclamation, the discovery of God's presence comes at a price. He refers to that price as a "repentance:" a complete change in one's value system. What we once thought important we now push to the outskirts of our lives; what was once on the outskirts we now pull to the center. For Third-Isaiah, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, not people's comfort, is a priority. For Jesus, relationships, not wealth, status, or security is to be the focus of our lives. Only when we relate correctly with those around us, will God's presence become evident.

That's why Paul zeroes in on "the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" in our Galatians pericope. As we've heard over the last few weeks, some in the Apostle's Galatian community have traded their imitation of Jesus for the observance of the 613 Mosaic laws. Keeping rules and regulations is far easier and less messy than giving oneself for others. The latter entails a death which many refuse to accept. There's no end to such a giving; it goes on for a lifetime; much more complicated than just being circumcised or refusing certain foods.

Paul is convinced that those who imitate Jesus must expect to suffer the same pain he experienced. When he states, "I bear the marks of Jesus on my body," he's not referring to the "stigmata." He's simply reflecting on the fact that the wounds - physical and psychological - he's suffered over the years for proclaiming Jesus' message are the same wounds Jesus received. Relating with others always comes at a cost.

Perhaps we've yet to even look for God's kingdom because our Eucharistic presiders haven't made it clear that God's working in our lives right here and now.

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