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Immanuel Lutheran Church – Burns, WY
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 8C)
June 26, 2016
Text: Luke 9:51–62

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Lord set His face to go to Jerusalem. Today's gospel readings says that twice (vs. 51, 53) about Jesus. Our Lord is determined, come what may, to go to Jerusalem. It is a divine necessity. That's kind of a strange to think about God, don't you think. He **MUST** do something? Yes. Jesus is determined to Jerusalem for there He **MUST** be crucified, descend into hell, and rise again on the third day. Forty days after Easter, Jesus will ascend into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father almighty. Those things must be done if the Father's good and gracious will is to be done. So Jesus is determined. His face is set with rock solid, dogged determination to reach His final destination.

There are two motivating factors driving Jesus to keep these divine engagements. The first is the joy of fulfilling His Father's will and purpose. Jesus once said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (John 4:34). You can't get more basic than the need for food. And Jesus declares that His most basic and necessary sustenance is to accomplish the saving will of His Father. The second motivating factor is His love for you and me and the world. Jesus said, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you...Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:9, 13).

The writer to the Hebrews (12:2) summarizes Jesus' desire to reach Jerusalem as "who for the joy (take note of that word, joy) that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." Jesus saw past the mockery, shame, pain, suffering, and agony to the joy of fulfilling His Father's will, to the joy of seeing you and me reborn and made new in the glory of His resurrection life. For these reasons, Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem.

It was set soon after Adam and Eve's original sin when God the Father promised that a Son will be born who will crush the head of the evil serpent (Genesis 3:15). Further prophecies were given throughout the Old Testament: the Ancient of Days from Micah 5, the humble King entering Jerusalem on a donkey from Zechariah 9, the

Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, the resurrected Lord from Psalm 16, and the ascended Son of Psalm 2 and Psalm 110. The entire fabric of the OT is woven around the Lord Jesus' divine appointment in Jerusalem. All of human history was building up for this scheduled event. And it must be kept on time, no delays.

This must be firmly understood or Jesus' actions in vs. 52–62 (the rest of the gospel reading) will not make any sense. In fact, we might think Jesus heartless and unreasonable if we forget that Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem” in love and in joyful obedience to the Father's will and purpose. It is the divine necessity of Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension that gives shape and purpose to Christian discipleship. The unbelieving world doesn't understand Good Friday and Easter; consequently, it doesn't understand Christians and Christian discipleship.

In order to meet His divine appointment in Jerusalem, Jesus must travel through the region of central Israel called Samaria. The Jews and Samaritans didn't like each other. The disdain, the distrust are mutual. Both the Jews and the Samaritans claimed to be the true followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Both claimed to have the true place of worship. The Samaritans believed true worship took place on Mt. Gerizim; the Jews said worship must take place in Jerusalem. This ancient animosity is why the Samaritan village in vs. 52–53 did not receive Jesus and His disciples. They are Jews, strike one. They are heading to Jerusalem, strike two. You're out. You don't get a third strike so get out of town!!

James and John don't take too kindly to the Samaritans' rude treatment. “Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” (vs. 54). Let's call out another Sodom and Gomorrah on these folks, Lord! A little fire and brimstone will teach them a thing or two. They're just Samaritans anyway. Vs. 55 declares that Jesus rebukes James and John and they moved on to another village.

What's most extraordinary is that Jesus rebukes James and John in the same way He rebuked demons (4:35; 9:42) and sickness (4:39). Jesus uses the same word. In other words, the desire to bring judgment and condemnation upon anyone who rejects Jesus is demonic; it's of the devil! Jesus is in the business of saving the world, not condemning it. That's why the Lord has set His face to go to Jerusalem, for the joy of saving the Samaritans.

This is a perfect reminder of who and what we are as God's redeemed people. As Christians and members of Christ's holy Church by baptismal rebirth and confession

of faith, our chief desire and goal is that people embrace Jesus with saving faith and loving devotion. The desire for condemnation upon whoever opposes what we think is right or whatever group presents a threat to Christianity surfaces far too easily.

Lord, shall we call down fire from heaven upon Islam? Upon the atheists? Upon the secular media that ridicules Christianity and Christian morality? Upon the judges who have paved the way for the legalization of gay marriage? When and where does the calling forth of heavenly fire stop? Jesus rebuked James and John in the same way as He rebuked demons and sicknesses for such thinking. Our response to current challenges must be of a different spirit.

As God's people, this is our time to shine the light of truth to our world that is becoming increasingly dark. This task has fallen to us. Our face must be set with equal determination to remain true to what God has given us in and through Jesus Christ regardless of what our culture says to the contrary.

But our spirit and motivation must not be one of judgment or condemnation but rather that of the Lord Jesus; a desire to bring God's love and salvation to everyone who is caught in error's trap. We Lutherans have for far too long assumed that our culture is supportive and amendable to Christian teaching and morality. We can no longer live with such assumptions. Instead, we must see ourselves as missionaries to our neighbor, our town, our state, our county, our world.

The ancient Christians converted the pagan Roman Empire not by enacting laws and political statutes but by proclaiming and living the love and life of Jesus Christ. They were faithful to their families and marriages when everyone else wasn't. They cared for the poor and downtrodden when no one else would. Those early Christians prayed for their leaders even as those same leaders were ordering their executions. An entire Empire was converted with a simple confession of faith: I am a Christian. At home, at work, at vacation, in leisure, in public and in private, I am a Christian.

My appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is to be Christian. To live out your baptismal calling in every area of your life. Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem so that you can receive priceless gifts of grace, forgiveness, joy and hope that transcend the trials and struggles of this world. Take Good Friday and Easter to work; take the crucified and resurrected Jesus to your civic obligations; fill your homes and marriages with the joy of fulfilling the Father's will and purpose; confess in word, thought, and deed that you are a Christian.

We have a divine appointment to keep: to Jerusalem we must go. Not the earthly Jerusalem in Palestine but the heavenly Jerusalem. While we journey there, we set our faces to the noble and high calling of living and proclaiming the living Lord Jesus Christ. Glory be to Jesus.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.