

Sermon 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost June 27, 2010 Luke 9:51-62

Wow, this is my first sermon here at Shepherd of the Hills. Usually there are high expectation with the first and the lasts. I do remember my first sermon at Trinity, and what was interesting, I had a good number of people come to me two weeks ago, before I preached my last sermon there advising me on what should I preach about. I liked some of the suggestions, especially the one to take the best parts from my sermons and combine them together and preach that. ☺ Of course I didn't do that for a simple reason, first of all it would be a very confusing sermon and second of all, that's not what the Gospel reading was about.

The reason why I'm mentioning the Gospel reading is because 90 % of the time I do preach on the Gospel reading for I believe that this world, and all of us, desperately need to hear the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ. The news that brings us hope and peace, the news that creates and nourishes our faith and strengthens our everyday lives. I can't say how much I am excited to preach the Gospel in the Shepherd of the Hills and my prayer is that the seeds that will be planted through the word of God into our hearts will grow and bear fruit.

That was the goal of Jesus as he continued with his ministry in Galilee, making his way slowly to Jerusalem where he would suffer and die on the cross and then on the third day be raised to life. Jesus knew that the time was near and in the previous verses he tells the disciples that he's the Messiah and what will have to take place. And the disciples seem to be on board, but we can tell that they're clearly confused. Our Gospel reading says, that when the days drew near for him to be taken up to heaven after his resurrection, Jesus sent messengers ahead of him as they traveled towards Jerusalem. (pause) Did you know that apostle means the one who is sent out? Jesus sends his apostles, his messengers to get things ready for him. I absolutely love this commission. Jesus sends his disciples to make things ready for him.

Sometimes we ask ourselves as Christians, **what is it that we're supposed to do?** We know that Christ died and was raised and that he is coming again, but what are we supposed to do until then? (pause) We have the answer in today's Gospel reading. Go ahead of Jesus, to get things ready for him. (pause) That's our calling, that's our mission. It's easy, right? (pause)

Well let's take a look at how did the disciples do. They walked into the Samaritan village and guess what? The people in the village didn't listen to the disciples and did not receive him!

And there was a reason for that, his face was set towards Jerusalem. Jesus wasn't a Samaritan, he was a Jew and Jews and Samaritans didn't exactly see eye to eye.

You see the Samaritans came to Israel while the Jews were in exile. They started to worship Yahweh the God of the Jews but kept their old pagan gods as well. When the Hebrews returned from the exile and started to rebuild the city of Jerusalem Samaritans wanted to join them, but they were rejected. And since the animosity between these two groups grew, Samaritans stopped worshipping Yahweh in Jerusalem and built their own temple for Yahweh on the mountain Gerizim. And that's what today's Gospel refers to when it says that Jesus' face was set towards Jerusalem, not Mt. Gerizim.

It is important for us to understand what was going on between the people in the time of Jesus' ministry in order for us to be able to connect it to our lives today. I had a meeting with the Bishop Boerger at the synod office on Monday and I asked him to describe this area as a mission field. One of the things he said was that this area is one of the most un-churched areas in the United States. When I talked to some of my friends who did the ministry in this area they said the same thing. They said it's very different from Pennsylvania, where people go to church because their families always have been going to church. Is it like that here? You lived here longer than I, is this true? (pause) Is it true that people living in Northwestern Washington don't necessarily receive Christ with open arms for their faces aren't set towards the cross? Their faces are set towards different "gods" and values? (pause)

If this is the case then we're like the disciples sent out to the Samaritan village, to get things ready for Christ. And our job is not easy, for we encounter many people who think differently. And sometime we probably think, dear Lord, it would be good if you'd sent fire to come down and consume them. (pause) Well, this is bit of an extreme; I really hope that these aren't our thoughts. ☺ But we might have similar thoughts: We tried and it didn't work, they worship different gods and things, they're too busy to listen, too busy to come to church, too content or too ignorant. This was the reaction of the disciples when they came back to Jesus telling him about their experience. But Jesus didn't let them complain, he didn't let them go on with discouraging or judgmental comments, instead he rebuked them. For he knew that bitterness or complaints will not bring people to Christ.

And so if this is not the answer, what is? I believe that Christ would say: it's love, acceptance and perseverance. The Gospel says that after Jesus rebuked them they continued and went to another village. They didn't stop, they didn't say we tried and it didn't work, they went on preparing the way, getting things ready for God.

How do we get things ready for Christ? How do we use our gifts as we are sent out to go ahead of him? Are we enthusiastic, loving, caring, and willing to witness not only in church but in our everyday lives? Apostle Paul says in our second reading: Live by the Spirit, give your life to God and he will guide you by his Spirit and will enable you to bear the fruit which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If we can bear this fruit in our everyday lives, we'll be getting things ready for our Lord in the best possible way. If we can as a congregation bear the fruit of the Spirit, people will start coming for they'll see that there is something different, something special about this place.

I have no doubt that Shepherd of the Hills is a place where the Spirit is active and bears fruit. Where people follow Jesus and go as they are sent out to get things ready for Christ. Jesus says in today's Gospel, follow me, don't look back, the kingdom of God is waiting; it's time to get things ready for me. Do you think we can do that here? Can we enable Christ to touch the hearts and transform the lives of people in this place? Are we up for this challenge? I will be the first one to stand up and say that I am. But I can't do it without you. All of us are sent out, all of us are called. What will your answer be? Do you say amen? And all God's people said: Amen!