

The time has come.

It is time for Jesus to turn his face toward Jerusalem.

After three years of teaching, healing, and creating disciples, Jesus now turns his intention, his focus, on the end of his mission.

Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem is the Temple, the center of Jewish worship. God can be found in the temple. God is served in the temple by the most pure of the pure priests. God, in the temple, awaits the gifts of sheep, birds, coins, cows, necessary to atone, to seek forgiveness from God for breaking one of God's rules. Jerusalem, occupied by Roman Empire authority, who impose their own steep taxation on top of what the temple required. There was wealth in Jerusalem but there was poverty everywhere else.

But Jesus isn't going for the money.

Jesus is going to die.

And then Jesus is going to experience the impossible and show the world the truth behind the great lie. In Jerusalem Jesus is going to be raised from the dead. After dying he is going to walk again among his friends, still teaching and laughing with them.

The great lie is this: In this world there is not enough. Not enough food, not enough water, not enough shelter, not enough joy, not enough health, not enough books, not enough life. We have to protect ourselves and what we have because there's not enough to share. The great truth is what Jesus is about to prove - In God's world there is enough for everyone - even life itself continues without limit in ways still beyond our imagination.

All of that is about to be revealed, but that is not where we are in Jesus' story.

Jesus has just turned his face toward Jerusalem. The time for teaching is over. The time for healing is done. Now is the time for going.

And the shortest distance between Jesus and Jerusalem will take Jesus straight through some very hostile territory. The land of the Samaritans.

The Samaritans and the Jews are more alike than different. They worship God - but they worship God in different places. They claim different sets of rules on how to be a proper and faithful follower of God. They still worshiped the same God but how they worshipped that God made them enemies instead of brothers and sisters. They couldn't accept that there might be a reasonable difference of opinion on how where where to worship God. For these two communities there was only one way - and the other way was not just wrong, it was blasphemy.

It was dangerous for Jew to walk through Samaria. Many Jewish people chose to walk several days around Samaria rather than take the risk.

Jesus doesn't care.

Jesus has turned his face toward Jerusalem and if the straightest line to Jerusalem takes him through Samaria, then that is the road he will take.

Jesus doesn't treat Samaria any different from any other journey he has made. He sends ahead messengers to a village seeking shelter for Jesus and his traveling companions. The village refuses to offer shelter or hospitality. Its dangerous to sleep out in the open. There are hungry animals and there are humans with bad intentions. It is uncomfortable to sleep out in the open on hard ground with little protection from the weather or the evening's cool temperatures. And without a welcome from the village, everyone in Jesus' party is about to go hungry till they find the next village.

But that's not the reason the disciples want to bring down fire from the sky so they can blow up the unwelcoming village. By refusing Jesus shelter, the village has given significant insult to Jesus. They have refused to respect him in a world where everything depended on being respected, by being properly honored. If you are not respected then you become a victim. Everything you have will be taken away from you simply because someone else can take it away and no one will stop it from happening. If you have no respect, no honor, everyone will believe you deserve to be treated as if you are nothing. The disciples are outraged. They are angry and they want to defend themselves and Jesus. They want revenge. They want teach that village and all of Samaria a lesson. They want people to know that Jesus is not someone to be dis-respected.

Only Jesus isn't interested.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and it doesn't matter if he sleeps out in the open or under a roof.

The village is simply a distraction. If there is shelter, great. If not, fine, whatever. Not important and not worth another moment of attention or energy. Not even worth the anger.

Have you ever been really angry with some one or some institution? I have. I have gone through a divorce and I will tell you I have spent months, even years of my life being very very angry with the father of my daughters. *He did me wrong*, I tell myself when I take my morning shower. *He deserves to be punished* I would say at night when I was trying to go to sleep and didn't want to think about how alone I was.

I think Anger is a protective emotion. I think anger is born in fear and its a way to go out and defend ourselves from threats like being alone, or being refused respect, or losing our home. Anger is a way to stay stirred up and scanning the horizon for all kinds of threats. Whatever happens, whatever comes toward me I'll just zap it into the ground before it can hurt me.

Only anger blocks out the good as well as the bad. If we stay angry, we stay afraid. If we stay angry, we can claim joy. If we stay angry, we can't take risks that lead to new life. If we stay angry, we stay trapped in front of the closed gates of Samaritan villages, waiting for that fire storm to come rain revenge from the heavens. Even if we walk away from the village, if we chose to remember our anger, we will carry that village with us every step of the rest of our lives.

Jesus knows this.

Jesus knows that anger, prolonged anger, is a distraction.

Jesus knows that there is more important work to do in front of him and the disciples.

Jesus knows that the most important thing to do is to forget about the village and just keep moving forward.

Jesus has a mission.

And nothing was going to slow him down

Not homelessness - what was a house to him any longer anyway?

Not family either - don't go back he tells some would be disciples. Don't go back and bury your father, don't go back and say good by. Those are old ways and old connections and they are going to keep you from talking about the Love of God right now and right here.

This is a radical new life, Jesus is saying to everyone. Don't go back to the old ways of seeking revenge. Don't go back to old ways of kinship ties and community bindings that hold you down. Don't worry about shelter or things. Just keep going toward the new life. Just keep going toward the revelation of God. Jesus is saying, embrace the freedom of your new call.

Embrace the freedom of putting your hand to the plow, Jesus says.

Now, I'm a city girl so while I can follow all the other examples in this morning's text, I have to confess I've never touched a plow in my life. I've kept small vegetable gardens but I've not farmed any big fields. Everything I know about ploughing I have learned from You Tube and the Internet. And this is what I know.

Ploughing land means turning over earth in order to plant seeds.

Its helpful to have straight rows when planting seeds because straight rows uses all the land as efficiently as possible. Its easier to water, its easier to harvest. Straight lines when plowing is good. The way you get a straight line is by keeping your focus on a tree or a bush in front of you on the other side of the field. Don't look left. Don't look right, Don't read or send texts on your cell phone. Don't look behind you to see how you are doing. Do one thing and one thing only. Put your focus in front of you and trust that you will get there just as you have intended. Your plough will follow your focus.

I may not plough a field but I do knit and I follow a similar form of concentration when knitting. If I start a row of stitches, I sit there and finish that row. I don't quit. Its difficult to come back and pick up a row in the middle. Not impossible but difficult. Here's another example: If you want to wash a window, you soap it up and then right away and no later, you start to wipe it clear with a squeegee. Straight strokes down the window, one after another and you don't take a break half way through or the window will be worse then when you started. When I go to sew, I start a run of fabric through the sewing machine and I don't stop until I

reach the end of the run. There are many places in our life where we have to set our hand to the plough or the window glass or the yarn needle and not stop until we've completed our task.

There's a kind of freedom in that discipline. I think it's the kind of freedom that Paul talks about in our second reading. If we could do anything, choose anything - how do we choose? We can choose to live as if we were the most important person in the room. We could do all the fun things, eat all the best food, and kick our neighbors out of their houses just because we can and we like their view better. We can take all the oil from Nigeria and not leave behind enough resources for people to live a decent life. We can ignore proper streets and water management controls in Ghana so that flooding creates terrible damage and suffering. We can wear for a few months the clothes sewn in near slave labor conditions without thought about how to change those conditions. But if we want to live this way, we have to be prepared to live in fear and in anger. We have to be prepared to defend ourselves, to build walls and fences, to pay for police and soldiers to board trains as they approach the borders, "Passport please," they say to some passengers but not others.

Or we could choose to live as if our journey is set toward the same destination as Jesus Christ - A world where there is enough for everyone. We can keep walking past the distractions of anger or insult because we are moving toward love and wholeness, we are moving toward Jerusalem where the dead are raised up into eternal life. We can live as if this whole Christian story actually means something true and that the fruits of the Spirit - Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Generosity, Faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control - are real, and are worth pursuing.

The world changed this last weekend.

The world is always changing but we usually don't see it. The village of the United Kingdom voted to close their gates against unrestricted movement of citizens within the European Union. The vote was painfully close and we are all still sorting out just what that vote means. How to honor it, or perhaps ignore it or perhaps undo it or perhaps figure out how to live with it. We are all impacted by this - European Union Citizen or not, United Kingdom passport certified or not and none of us know how this is going to go. We all have good reason to be concerned,

to be angry or broken hearted or both or afraid. But we also have this text this morning.

The world changes and there is much in this world to distract us. Governments and people try to form communities that then also fall apart, not unlike marriages sometimes I wonder. When that happens, where do we want to point our focus? When our visas and residence permits expire, where do we want to point our focus? When we feel overwhelmed with everything that is new and changing all the time, where do we want to point our focus?

We want to point our focus toward the same direction that Jesus is going. Toward the Reigndom of God. Toward the reality that God has control over everything - including death itself. We want to point our focus toward hope, toward the new life, toward the Good News of the Gospel.

It turn out that if your hand should slip while washing a window - and I am speaking from personal experience here - you can put new soap and water on the glass and start over again. It turns out that if your plough starts heading off to the far left corner, you can go back and reset the blade in the earth. It turns out that no matter how much crazy is going on in our life or in this world, we can go back to where we find Jesus focused on his journey to Jerusalem. We can join back up with him on his way and he won't be angry. He won't scold. Jesus will just smile at us and tell us welcome back. We have a journey to complete together - all of us and Jesus too.

Brexit is huge. It will distract all of us. The ongoing war in Syria and the economic and environmental failures that leave so much suffering in Africa and around the world will and should distract us. They are signs of a world still moving toward God's Truth, God's vision of wholeness and restoration and we won't get there until we all change our ways. We chose the fruits of the spirit rather than our own self-interests.

In these times, like so many other times, our focus will shift away from our goal - but we know that we still belong to God. And we are still on our way toward God. On a personal level, If it all seems way too overwhelming, way too out of control then stop moving. Take a breath. Remember to whom you belong and remember the journey you are on. We are all moving toward Jesus and New life. Take a breath, and shift put your focus back the tree on the other side of the field.

Shift your focus on the next thing that needs doing. Shift your focus on the next step forward.

Remember, you can keep turning your face back to the direction you are called to travel toward. The one Paul points us toward. Jesus. The New Jerusalem. The reign of God. The Great Truth that says God is still with us, still calling us into our best selves. The Great Truth that we will find our way into God's community where no village slams shut their doors shut from fear or anger. Where no one goes hungry because there is enough. Where we will remember how much we belong to each other.

Let us all put our hands to the ploughs of our lives and do the best we can to keep a straight line from one side of the field to the other. God is with us in this. We are here to proclaim the Reign of God

Let the people say Amen.