

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

June 26&27, 2010

“Traveling with Jesus”

Luke 9:51-62

For many, summertime means travel time. There probably aren't too many of us here today who haven't either returned from a trip, aren't on one now, or aren't planning one for the near future. After all, summertime is a good time to travel.

But traveling isn't always easy. We have to decide where we're going – are we going to the mountains, the ocean, back to the Midwest or where? And we have to decide how we're going to get there – are we going by car or bus or train or plane? And it doesn't stop there. We also have to make certain necessary preparations – do we have enough money to go where we want to go and do what we want to do, are we covered at work, do we have someone to look after our house while we're gone, have we made arrangements to stop our mail and our newspaper, and on and on? And then, of course, we have to check our “travel attitude”, as someone once called it, are we going to push, push, push, or are we going to take our time and do some sightseeing along the way? Traveling can be fun but it's really only fun after we've made some important decisions and done some important work.

In a way, life itself is kind of like that – it's a trip that requires important decisions and important work. From cradle to grave, we are all traveling the road called life. For most, it's an erratic and confusing trip filled with starts and stops, ups and downs, detours and dead ends, with little or no meaning and no real goal or purpose in mind, other than to just get “there” wherever “there” may be. But traveling the road of life doesn't have to be that way, especially for us Christians. For we have our feet set on a path of grace -- not one that begins at birth and ends in death but one that begins at baptism and continues into eternity, And as we travel this path, we have a travel guide who has been this way before and who will not only see us safely to our destination – that is, the Father's home in heaven – but will also fill the trip with meaning and purpose and yes, I dare say, even fun.

You see, we're traveling with Jesus. And because we are, from time to time, even as we are on the move, we need to remember the travel arrangements and check out how our trip is going. Do we really know where we're going and how we're going to get there? Have we made or are we making all the necessary preparations for a successful and enjoyable trip? And how is our travel attitude? Are we pushing to do the Lord's work along the way or are we just sightseeing?

Jesus certainly knew where he was going and how he was going to get there. Today's Gospel lesson makes it very clear when it says, “he set his face to go to Jerusalem.” He was going there to die and he knew it. The Father's whole plan of salvation, especially his atoning death on the cross, was central to Jesus' travel plans. And with single-mindedness of purpose he was obedient to his Father's will and nothing could stop him.

St. Paul urges the same purposeful travel attitude for each of us in today's epistle lesson when he says, "If we live by the Spirit, let us walk by the Spirit." In the power of the Spirit we are called to travel life's path back to the Father with the same single-mindedness, clear purpose and goal, and willing obedience as that of Jesus. In our sin we were once on the road to death but now by the grace of God we are on the road to life.

Traveling with Jesus also means seeking to be single-minded as Jesus was. But when we're not, as we often aren't, we are called to repent, to receive his forgiveness, and to stand up, dust ourselves off, and continue our trip. Don't be fooled. Traveling with Jesus isn't easy. Like any other trip, there are demands and sacrifices to be made. Look at our Gospel lesson again. On the way to Jerusalem three men asked Jesus whether they could come along with him. The first man said, "I will follow you wherever you go." To which Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." It's his way of saying, "I'm not offering you easy discipleship nor do I offer you a trip without sacrifice. What I do offer is ultimate victory and a safe arrival in my Father's home. But if you care more about the things of this world more than you care about me then you aren't fit to travel with me."

The second man wanted to bury his father first. But Jesus said, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." In effect he was saying, as he had said so many times before, there is no room for conflicting loyalties in following him. If you care more about mother, father, sister and brother than you do about me then you are not fit to travel with me. But if you follow me, all your other relationships will fall into place.

The third man wanted to say goodbye first, to which Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." You see, if a man plows and keeps looking over his shoulder, the furrow will wander all over the field and, in the end, be of no use. Traveling with Jesus demands our full and exclusive attention. We can't afford to take our eyes off of him and look back or even look around at the old life or we may just lose our way and our trip will be in vain.

It's summertime and many of us are traveling. But on this fifth Sunday after Pentecost it's important to remember that there's a more important trip that we're all on – we are traveling the road of life with Jesus. Traveling with him is the most important thing we do no matter what time of year it is. To travel with him, means that we, like him, need to know where we're going – to our Father's home --and how we're going to get there – by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. To travel with him means making the necessary preparations – that of leaving behind all that would weigh us down and walking solely by the Spirit with our eyes fixed on Jesus. To travel with him means constantly checking our travel attitude – proclaiming and living repentance and mercy along the way. To travel with him means sharing the blessings of the trip – the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation which he has earned for us and for all through his life, death and resurrection with everyone we meet along the way.

May God bless our travels this summer but more importantly, may He bless our travels with Jesus forever. In His name. Amen.