

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

GOD UNDETERRED

Luke 9:51-62

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 8)

Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

51When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. 52And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; 53but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. 54When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" 55But he turned and rebuked them. 56Then they went on to another village. 57As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." 58And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head." 59To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." 60But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." 61Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." 62Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

DIAGNOSIS: Deterred

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Waivering Followers*

All kinds of excuses get in the way of following Jesus: The

first in this particular account from Luke is the unwillingness (of a whole village) to listen (v. 53). And, if you don't listen, you certainly can't believe or follow. That just makes sense. But others, who seem to want to follow, have other reasons that prevent their discipleship: One is discouraged (apparently) by the prospect of tough working conditions (v. 57), another by family obligations (the need to bury a father, v. 59), and yet one more by the need to "bring closure" to his activities at home (v. 61). Such excuses might be understood in other circumstances, but are simply distractions to Jesus who has-as Luke plainly tells us-"set his face to go to Jerusalem" (v. 51). Jesus has no time to be slowed by such excuses.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – Hesitant, Nigh Unwilling

Maybe the superficial excuses aren't really the issue. Maybe it's that such immediate excuses show a deeper hesitancy-that is, to follow Jesus at all! Perhaps they sense, since Jesus makes no bones about it, that this ministry will not be easy. And they don't want to work too hard. Unwillingness to work hard is the reason a lot of good things don't get accomplished in our lives: It's the reason so few of us exercise regularly, continue to play an instrument, or maintain healthy eating habits. There's a cost to such practices. And to say that there will be a cost to following Jesus is an extreme understatement. Maybe these would-be followers had sniffed that out. Maybe it's the reason so many of us want Jesus' love without the cost of discipleship.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – Led Astray

The disciples' reaction to this unresponsive crowd is to make fire rain down from heaven (v. 54). Call it righteous indignation on their part. They want only the wrath of God for such half-hearted disciples. (Little did they realize that they too would be counting the cost of discipleship later, just like

these others!) Sadly, even without the help of wrath-filled disciples, failing to follow Jesus has its own consequence: We who fail to follow, are Christ-less. And living without Christ is its own hell.

PROGNOSIS: Undeterred

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – Facing Jerusalem

What can't be missed in this encounter between Jesus and his many would-be followers is that, while they waiver, Jesus does not. He "sets his face" on Jerusalem (the place where he is one moment acclaimed, and the next crucified), and accepts the cost. Jesus accepts death on the cross without hesitation. He pays the price-obedient to the Father's desire to be reconciled to a broken world. And we gain the reward: New life with God. In fact, Christ's very determination to face Jerusalem means we are not "Christ-less," but have in fact gained Christ.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – Hesitation Aside

Such deliberate love can't be ignored. In fact, spoken in the villages of our hearts, it sends the riff-raff in us running, and draws out the helpless self in us who knows her need for just such a Savior (a Jerusalem Savior). Such dogged yet gracious intention is undeniably wonderful! It's the kind of love you want to sing and praise God for, in fact. This Savior elicits faith.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – Unwaivering

And, knowing this unwaivering, undeterred Savior, makes us deliberate in our mission. We've not encountered a love like this any where else, and we want the world to know it. So we set our faces on Seattle, and San Diego, and Boston, and Baltimore. Because in those places too a Savior is needed. And in those places, and so many more, our Jerusalem Savior seeks out followers, offering them his unwaivering love.