

*“When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up,
 he set his face toward Jerusalem.”*

Earlier this week I thought this Sunday might be a “dress up” day when I don my shawl to take on the persona of a character in the gospel. But as the days went by I couldn’t decide which compelling character to tackle.

- Should I be that over-eager beaver who promises to follow Jesus to the ends of the earth -- without a clue as to what he’s getting himself into? The one whom Jesus warns that following him is not a spur of the moment lark, but a life-altering commitment?
- Or should I be one of the folks Jesus invites to follow him? But who basically says, “Gee, I’d love to follow you, Jesus, but I’ve got to wash my hair.” Actually, they say something much more serious about first burying their father or saying good-bye to the folks back home – important, on the face of it. But in this context it feels more like an excuse than a reason. An excuse for not making Jesus the first and last priority, the alpha and omega.
- Or should I be one of the disciples James or John who are so quick to condemn the Samaritans, who they relegate to being “the other”. By their offer to rain down fire on them, they totally dehumanize the Samaritan people.

We are so quick to judge and dismiss and divide ourselves one from another, aren’t we?

I’m thinking particularly of those migrant children, without their parents, crammed into substandard government facilities down on the southern border with our tax dollars in our names.

We can (and I expect we do) have different opinions about how we as a nation should address immigration reform. That’s valid. But the way those children are being mistreated in the meantime?

I believe Jesus is rebuking us just as he rebuked the disciples James and John for their disdain of the Samaritans.

So I decided not to choose any one of these personas, because I could relate to bits of all of them:

- Like the over-eager beaver, I'm often tempted to make a superficial half-hearted effort without following through with it.
- Like the ones who rebuffed Jesus' invitation to follow, I have plenty of excuses for not making time to pray, not speaking out against injustice, not reaching out to someone in need.
- And, God help me, like James and John, I judge others fiercely. I can get so distracted or apathetic – *or scared* – that I fail to honor the divine in those different than myself.

But here's some good news.

Following Jesus is not so much about *where we start out as where we end up.*

Today is a huge turning point in Luke's gospel.

The clue is a phrase that appears twice in as many verses:

"Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem."

And what awaits him in Jerusalem?

The cross and, in three days, the empty tomb.

Every gospel lesson we'll read from now until Thanksgiving is part of this travelogue to Jerusalem.

Week after week, Sunday after Sunday,

parables and vignettes all of which take place en route to Jerusalem

as Jesus teaches what it means to follow him

on the way of sacrifice. The way of service. The way of love.

So whether or not the preacher (be it me or anyone else) mentions it, please remember – in every gospel lesson from now until when ___ ? [Thanksgiving] that Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem.

This, then, is the beginning of Jesus' journey,

but it's not the end of the line for the other folks in this gospel either.

Take James and John, making that horrific offer to annihilate the Samaritans.

Jesus rebukes them, yes, but keeps them as his disciples.

He doesn't give up on them but keeps showing them a better way. *His way, of love.*

And what about the others?

That over-eager beaver who wanted to jump in without thinking?

Maybe he did think about it and decided that following Jesus was worth the uncertainty and risk.

And the ones who made excuses for not following Jesus?

Maybe they decided to take Jesus up on his offer after all.

Maybe they realized that following Jesus already involves every aspect our lives.

So where are you today?

Where are you – Spiritually? Psychically? Emotionally? Intellectually?

Wherever it is, fabulous or not, you don't have to stay there.

You can go further. You can grow.

There's always more to learn.

Always a chance to be more like Jesus –

who set his face toward Jerusalem

and invites you to turn and join him on the way of love.

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