

June 27, 2010 – The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

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Luke 9:51-62, Galatians 5:1, 13-25

It was a serious time. It was a time for rebuke and for harsh teachings. The time was near when Jesus would be taken up upon the cross, up upon the cross, in the greatest act of love ever known to humanity.

Jesus had set his face toward Jerusalem, toward that cross. Nothing else mattered. When they entered a Samaritan town the people would not receive him because he was going to the despised Jerusalem. James and John were angry at this non-reception. They apparently had not gotten the message of love from Jesus and said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them. Of course, he rebuked them. What else would the King of Love do?

We need to understand that there are many, too many Christians today who act like James and John. When they see others not receiving Jesus exactly as they think he should be received, they condemn these others. They threaten that fire will come down and consume them for having the wrong beliefs. They need to understand that Jesus challenges and rebukes all such unloving behavior. You cannot be a friend to Jesus by becoming an enemy of those for whom he died. There is enough condemnation and hatred in the world without it being among people who embrace Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Several people said they would follow, perhaps not understanding the seriousness of the moment – not understanding the journey would end with the

arms of Christ stretched out on the cross in love to embrace the world. One said, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus told him that he had no home, no place to lay his head. That was enough to make the man withdraw his promise. Another said, "I will follow you but let me first go and bury my father." Another said he would follow, but first let me say farewell to those at home. Now those seemed reasonable requests unless you remember that Jesus was on his way to the cross and to the saving act of bringing God's love fully, visibly, wonderfully, into the world. Saying "Yes...but" to God is often our way of saying "No".

Jesus says those harsh words, "Let the dead bury the dead" to remind us all that there is nothing more important than the cross. And he says, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

I remember when I was twelve, really I do, when my parents thought it would be good for me to spend six summer weeks at a working farm. I became familiar with farm chores and with the animals and the day came when it was suggested that I could hitch the mule to the plow and work the fields. I think I have always had the tendency to look back to check out how I am doing in my life. It doesn't work, especially when plowing. I looked back to see how I was doing and I could not understand how the plow rut was curving back and forth all over the field. To plow or to live correctly one must keep his eye on the goal ahead. If I keep looking back at my shortcomings, mistakes and sins I will probably repeat them all. But if I keep my face toward the salvation of God that brings God's grace and love into my life then there will be a straight path into peace and wholeness.

But there can be a danger in thinking that salvation is just between me and my God; thinking that the new life is my knowing God's love for me and my

loving God. There is a dangerous selfishness in seeing myself as saved and others as lost or doomed. In this morning's reading St. Paul voices this warning to the people of Galatia. "Christ has set us free...but do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence. Instead, through love become slaves, through love become servants to one another." Paul is speaking to people who love God and know the commandment to love God with ones whole being. But he sees people loving God and mistreating each other, so he says, "the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another." Around the world today and even within the Church, there seems to be an increase in biting and consuming one another, with a decrease in love, a decrease in forgiveness, a decrease in respect, a decrease in valuing the lives of others. The voices of James and John and others calling forth fire from heaven must be rebuked and replaced by voices proclaiming clearly and without threat, the love of God for God's whole creation, the amazing love of God for every person.

I do believe that in the life, death and resurrection of Christ my salvation is complete. At the same time I believe that as long as war rules, and hunger rules, and hating rules, and children are neglected, my salvation is not complete. The life of Jesus was not spent in assuring salvation for himself but rather giving himself, his perfect relationship to God, as a gift for the salvation of the whole world. I have always thought that Jesus weeping in the Garden of Gethsemane was not for himself but was because he knew the hatred and lack of love among the people of God. It is often a burden to really be aware of others. I am tempted to just sit in church and enjoy the quiet. But Jesus does call us to be aware the world's condition, to join him at times in weeping, and certainly to join him in bringing his salvation, his good news of God's unconditional love to others. Yes, we are saved,

but we cannot be saved in isolation. In some small way we must be a part of the saving love of God to others.

St. Paul said, “The fruit of God’s Spirit is love. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us be the people of the God of love.