

June 27, 2010 5th Sunday after Pentecost *At Home in God*
 Luke 9:51-62

There is a difference between a Christian and a disciple. Which are you? That's what was burning in the heart of Jesus as the days drew near for him to go to Jerusalem. The Gospel writer says,

When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. Luke 9:51

He knows what awaits him there. On his way there he encounters three would-be disciples—

folks who are attracted to Jesus by his message of love; folks who sense in their hearts that he loves them just as God does; folks who eagerly consider themselves a part of the family of faith; folks who know, deep down, that they are really at home in God.

That's why these three ask to follow him. As I read this text my sense is that these three are probably already Christian (although that name was not yet current at the time).

They already loved Jesus;
 they already experienced the grace of God in their lives;
 they already felt themselves a part of the family;
 they really did feel at home in God

or they would not have asked to join up. I think they already said “yes” to God and they wanted to know what comes next.

So they ask to go with him on his way to Jerusalem. He warns the first that you may not have secure and regular accommodation on this journey—maybe even no place to spend the night at all. He refuses another because he first wanted to bury his father. The third he scolds for wanting to first say goodbye before he leaves saying,

No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God. Luke 9:62

Jesus clearly considers these three as false starts as disciples. What on earth is Jesus talking about here? What comes after you say “Yes?” What does it really mean to be at home in God?

Well, it is often helpful to keep in mind that Jesus who said these things also said,

If your eye offends you, pluck it out—for it is better to enter the Kingdom of God with one eye than to perish with your full sight.

He also said,

Whoever comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.

Now did Jesus actually insist that you remove your eye or hate every single person who is dear to you before you can be his disciple? Of course not. You see, Jesus was fond of using “Semitic hyperbole”—the ancient folks of that culture often exaggerated to make a point. It’s like the day a long time ago when one of my children came home late (I won’t tell you which one!). When the child finally came in the door late I said, “I’m going to hang you up by your ears and tie ‘em behind your head!” Now was I really going to do that? No. Was I really mad? Yes. You see, I used “Davidson hyperbole”—a method of exaggeration I learned from my mother who told me more than once, “I’m going to box your ears!” Now she never did, of course, but I never had any trouble knowing when she was upset with me. So, of course Jesus doesn’t want you to hate your family to be his disciple—but you better not love him any less than them;

neither does he really want you to remove your eye—but you sure better watch what you see, what you look at, what enters your soul through your sight;

In the same way I don’t think Jesus is saying “never say goodbye;” nor is he teaching disrespect for the dead. Jesus is lifting up the radical commitment, the vital importance, the ultimate priority discipleship demands. You are either at home in God or you live somewhere else!

You see, discipleship, is what comes after you say “yes.” Disciples are at home in God.

Over seven years ago now my Dad fell and fractured two vertebrae in his neck. It was indeed a very close call for him and we were grateful for his

eventual successful recovery. He wore a neck brace for six months as a part of that treatment. There was time, after he was out of intensive care and needed to be released from the hospital, that his doctor recommended that he go to the local rehabilitation center to complete his recovery. He was not walking very well then and wasn't eating well either, with that brace on his neck and everything. When the time came for him to decide whether to accept transfer from the hospital to the rehabilitation center, the doctor asked Dad, "Do you want to get better? Do you want to go home?" he said, "Yes!" So what comes after you say "yes?" How do you get home? Well, you follow a discipline, right? For Dad it was getting used to a walker, walking looking straight ahead instead of down at your feet, taking full, sure strides rather than little bittie steps. If any of you have ever had this experience you know very well what this is all about. Rehabilitation is sometimes painful and difficult. But I believe every single one of you who may have ever had this experience just had to say the same thing: "I'm going to do everything they tell me to do, because I want to go home!"

Now fractures heal all by themselves. Your body heals itself from surgery. You don't have to do a thing for that healing to come to your life other than let the physician care for you. But

if you really want to get better,

if you want to be the full and whole person you really can be,

if you want to go home

you have to do what the physical therapist tells you to do; you have to follow the discipline.

You see, there is a difference between a healed fracture and a healed person. There is a difference between a recovered hip injury and a recovered life. Bones heal on their own by God's grace but muscle and tendons and joints need to be worked if you're going to really walk around in all the fullness and wholeness of life God intends and get you home. If you don't follow the discipline, you may not get home at all.

So there is a difference between a Christian and a disciple. A Christian knows God's love and accepts that love in his/her heart. A Christian's heart is healed by the forgiveness, acceptance, and grace of God through Jesus Christ. A Christian's heart is healed as soon as you say yes to him and let the divine physician care for you. That's all you have to do. When you say "yes" you don't have to do a thing to be healed, forgiven, accepted, and loved by God. But what comes after you say "yes"? Well, it depends on whether you want to go home. You see, I am afraid that this world, this nation, this community, this church is chock full of Christians who aren't yet disciples. How do I know this? Well, there are so many folks

- who are afraid and fearful of what may come next in life;
- who still worry who's the greatest;
- who go their own way and not God's way.

Too many of us are so ill with the diseases of this culture—afflicted by status and wealth and power. I know this because I've seen so many plowed fields where the rows are not straight and true but run crooked by so much looking back. That's how I know.

You can be a Christian and God will accept you just like you are but unless you choose to be a disciple of Jesus you are so susceptible to be a disciple of so many other things. You open yourself up to so much more pain, so many wrong turns, too many hard lessons.

The more I think about it the more I believe that the church is more like a rehabilitation center than a hospital. Now the church is a good hospital when you need one. Here you can find healing and wholeness and love when you submit to the care of the divine physician. We have the cure for the heartache in the depth of your soul. But too many of us get well, become a member of the family, and just show up for Sunday dinner now and then.

You're a member of the family but the question is,

- do you also work in the field?

- Is God just a passing acquaintance to you or your true friend?

Do you have a real, sincere appreciation for Jesus or are you really devoted to him?

Do you know about him or do you know him?

Do you keep company with him or do you stand right by his side all the way to Jerusalem?

Do you want to get better or not?

Do you want to go home?

Sisters and brothers, I want to be so bold as to assume that you are here this morning because you're already Christian. You come to church, you hear this Word preached, you kneel at this rail trying your best to be a disciple. You want to get better. You want to be home. You don't want to be susceptible any more to all the wrong directions in life. You have put your hand to the plow and you're trying really hard not to look back. Well, friends, you're in the right place. You see, the Church is in the business of making disciples; that's what I'm really hear for; that's what your church staff is charged to do; that is this congregation's mission.

There is a difference between a Christian and a disciple. That's what was burning in the heart of Jesus as the days drew near for him to go to Jerusalem. A disciple is one who follows the disciplines of the Master. A disciple eagerly takes up the disciplines of prayer, Bible Study, Sunday School, worship, partaking of the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, and practices deeds of love and mercy. These are the disciplines that heal you and recover your life.

There is a difference between a Christian and a disciple. Which one are you? As you leave this place today let me invite you to look straight ahead, don't look back, take long, sure strides, and go home.

William G. Davidson