

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost  
Galatians 5:1, 13-25, Psalm 77, Luke 9:51-62  
June 26, 2016  
David Teschner

“As they were going along the road, someone said to Jesus, ‘I will follow you wherever you go.’ And 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.’”

A resource I was reading said that a good title for a sermon on this text would be “Following Jesus to nowhere.” I like that. How about you? “Following Jesus to nowhere”

For those of us who like to plan and know pretty much every day what we are going to do, following Jesus to nowhere is a bit daunting.

I think all of you know by now that I intend to retire in late November of this year. For the last 30 years, I have put on a black shirt and collar nearly every morning and gone to work in one of only two churches. For nearly all of the 35 years before that I went to a school to learn or a school to teach nearly every day.

As I look toward retirement, I can imagine what it might truly mean to “Follow Jesus to nowhere.” I have some vague ideas of what I might do, but no specific plans whatsoever. I will be praying for creative new ways to use my time and energy to serve God.

But what might it mean for us who still keep a fairly regulated and routine lifestyle to follow Jesus to nowhere? Is it even possible?

In our gospel this morning, we are told that it’s time for Jesus to be taken up, and he has set his face to go to Jerusalem. This means that Jesus is now ready to leave the north of Israel around the Sea of Galilee, where he has been well received and safe, and travel south to Jerusalem, where he will meet with strong opposition. In other words, Jesus, like we recently witnessed by LeBron James of the Cleveland Cavaliers basketball team, has put on his “game face.” He is all business now.

Following Jesus to nowhere in this context means following Jesus to a known destination – Jerusalem, but to an uncertain outcome. When would-be followers ask to come along, Jesus wants to make sure they are fully committed – that they understand that the going will not be easy, but it is the only path to life’s fulfillment and spiritual enlightenment.

Leaving the dead to bury the dead refers to staying with or going back to the old ways of doing things. If we are not moving forward in the spiritual life, we are stagnating or even dying.

In the final verse today, Jesus says, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” I never tried to plow straight furrows behind a mule or an ox, but the same is true for riding a bike, driving a car or even walking down a long aisle. If you don’t look straight ahead, straight into Jesus’ face, you can all too easily swerve off course. Inappropriate cell phone use has definitely exaggerated the problem.

Faithful living requires dedication, persistence, constant attention and discipline. Jesus is still looking for companions who are “all in.” We can be helped to do that by examining our ultimate loyalties. Who or what always gets our immediate attention? Who or what do we never say no to? What are our priorities according to our checkbook register or credit card statement? How do we spend most of our free time?

Following Jesus to nowhere during scheduled or unscheduled time could mean being open and responsive to new situations and developments in the course of a day.

The men’s breakfast group has just started a new book by Dr. Wayne Dyer titled, I Can See Clearly Now. It is the story of his life. In an early chapter, during the early 1950’s, he recalls a time in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade when he was told by his classmates to shun two new transfer students because one was Roman Catholic and the other was Jewish. Instead, he made a point of getting to know both of them. By his willingness to befriend them, eventually all his classmates did as well. A young Wayne Dyer wasn’t going to judge someone based on labels or submit to peer pressure. Who knows what an ordinary day in the life will bring in school or at work?

In another story, a mythical one from the Islamic tradition, told by W. Scott Willard, Abd Mubarak was on his way back home from Mecca. He had just made the once in a lifetime Haj or sacred pilgrimage. That night he dreamed that he was in heaven. While there he overheard two angels having a conversation.

“How many pilgrims came to the holy city of Mecca this year?” one angel asked the other.

“Six hundred thousand,” came the answer.

“And how many had their pilgrimages accepted by God?”

The second angel responded, “None of them. However, in Baghdad there is a shoemaker named Ali Mufiq, who did not make the pilgrimage yet had his pilgrimage accepted by God.”

When Abd woke up the next morning, he was confused by the angels’ conversation in his dream. He didn’t know what it could possibly have meant, so he decided to go to Baghdad and see if he could find a shoemaker named Ali Mufiq.

He did and told him his dream. The shoemaker told him through his tears: "At great cost and much sacrifice, I finally managed to save up 350 coins to make my holy visit to Mecca. But then as I was preparing to leave, I discovered that my neighbors were hungry, so I distributed the money among them and gave up my pilgrimage."

Even the best laid plans, sometimes for all the right and appropriate reasons, might be diverted to nowhere, or at least not where we expected, for an even greater good, if we are paying attention.

Following Jesus to nowhere doesn't mean that we have to leave home, sell all our goods and join a monastery or convent or go to some far off place and do missionary work. We can be and Jesus wants us all to be missionaries or witnesses for him right where we are.

St. Paul writing to the Galatians gives us our marching orders when writes that the fruits of the Spirit are first love, then joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Practicing these every day in all the many and varied avenues of our lives is a huge, often humbling, and frequently exhilarating challenge. For all of us, to ask the Spirit to transform our lives in these ways day by day will lead us into new behaviors and worlds we have never known before.

We will follow Jesus to new nowheres that we will only be able to identify later as that mind-blowing somewhere we call eternal life. AMEN.