

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
Sermon Text: Luke 9:51-62
Related Text: Galatians 5:1, 13-25
Date preached: June 27, 2010

Grace to you and peace from God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In what direction are we looking? I'm not simply talking of course about what is right in front of our eyes.

Some have our eyes trained on self-indulgence. It becomes the, "what is in it for me;" anything that involves my time, energy and certainly money in this perspective must in some way benefit me.

Some are like the disciples James and John. They were given the task of preparing the way for Jesus in a village of Samaria. And when that village refuses to welcome Jesus and the disciples, they react in an emotional overload. "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" So over-reacting are they that Jesus rebukes them.

We come to the second half of the Gospel reading and we are confronted with some difficult sayings of Christ. Following Jesus is going to require undying

devotion and a giving away of self. It is going to mean keeping our eyes focused on him.

Following Jesus means that he is not going to be welcome in the places his followers are called to go. Jesus response to the man that wishes to go bury his father is appears particularly harsh, “Let the dead bury the dead.” And then another would be follower desires to say goodbye to family and friends, but is told that those who look back are not fit for the kingdom of God.

As I prepared and prayed regarding these texts there are several important discoveries. One, Christ calls for undying devotion on our part. This isn't about picturing people in our minds and saying, that's them, the drunkard, the jealous teenager, or the adulterous spouse.

This text challenges us to undying devotion to our Lord and Savior. Indeed, as we look at all these situations they fall under the first commandment that “thou shall have no other god's before me.” The “me” of course refers to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So as we look at our lives what we find is that we are full of me first attitudes. As much as we try as hard

as we want to point the finger at others, the reflection in the mirror still shows that we are the sinners, accountable to God.

God's response is one of abounding grace. Fear not, for you are not left in bondage to sin. For freedom Christ has set us free. The guilty, you and I, the many we know and the countless we do not know have been set free by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The purpose of this freedom is Christ looking. The freedom of Christ opens the door for us to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to see Christ present in them. Now there are at least two important things to keep before us.

Love of our neighbor calls us to look out for the best in our neighbors. Like our own lives our neighbors are not perfect. That does not mean that the neighbors we disagree with are filled with evil intentions or desires. What it does mean is that we seek the best for our neighbor, affirming them in the fruits of the Spirit that grow and are expressed in their life.

It also means that we love ourselves. That may be the hardest thing for us to do. Our lives are not black

and white simply listing a split between works of the flesh and fruits of the Spirit. We are both sinner and saint. The desires of the flesh are very real, and so too is the temptation to think more highly of ourselves or our abilities.

We proclaim the work of Christ, crucified and risen, who values us so much that he gave his life for the world. Set free in Christ means that our work is not to save ourselves or look out for our own interests.

Being set free in Christ, we have been gifted with the promised Holy Spirit that we may live our lives with love for one another. One of the means by which we can expand our love for one another is by offering more frequently the body and blood of Christ. For in offering it those who do not want it frequently show love for those who hunger for the very presence of Christ.

The practice of self-control guides us to give of ourselves that our neighbors may not suffer from the very basics of daily bread.

The Spirit reminds us that we have been set free. The Spirit, sent by God and sealed upon us in our baptism helps us keep our eyes in undying devotion to our Lord. Such devotion is seen when we love ourselves

acknowledging the grace of God upon our lives. For each of us was valuable enough in the sight of God that Christ died. As we see this in our lives, the Spirit will also lead us to see it in the lives of our neighbors. AMEN.