

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
June 27, 2010
Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing
Saint Luke 9:51-62

"When the days drew near for [Jesus] to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem."

Saint Luke 9:51

"The Parable Of The Lifesaving Station"

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur there was once a crude little lifesaving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves, they went out day or night tirelessly searching for the lost.

Many lives were saved by this wonderful little station, so that it became famous. Some of those who were saved, and various others in the surrounding areas, wanted to become associated with the station and give of their time and money and effort for the support of its work. New boats were bought and new crews were trained. The little lifesaving station grew.

Some of the new members of the lifesaving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and so poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea.

They replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in an enlarged building. Now the lifesaving station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they redecorated it beautifully and furnished it as a sort of club.

Less of the members were now interested in going to sea on lifesaving missions, so they hired life boat crews to do this work.

The mission of lifesaving was still given lip-service but most were too busy or lacked the necessary commitment to take part in the lifesaving activities personally.

About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boat loads of cold, wet and half-drowned people.

They were dirty and sick, some had skin of a different color, some spoke a strange language, and the beautiful new club was considerably messed up. So the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where victims of shipwreck could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most

of the members wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal pattern of the club.

But some members insisted that lifesaving was their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a lifesaving station.

But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the life of all various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own lifesaving station down the coast. They did.

As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. They evolved into a club and yet another lifesaving station was founded.

If you visit the seacoast today you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore. Shipwrecks are still frequent in those waters, but now most of the people drown!

-- Taken from Personal Evangelism 101, by Brent Hunter

St. Luke tells us how Jesus is keeping the main thing – the main thing: namely his mission to participate in the nearness of God. In Christ we see the kingdom of God coming near. Such presence of God is seen in Christ when he heals and teaches.

His healing ministry is a sign of the presence of God. When he lifts up the lowly, feed the hungry, takes away sickness – it is witness of God compassion for us. It is also a call to participate in God ongoing healing activity.

When Christ teaches: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” he is calling us to bear the fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Wherever these fruits are growing – there is the presence of God!

Mary Chapin Carpenter – sings in her song: “What You Look For”

“Be the seed that lands inside the crack

...be the child whose dreams won't ever fade

...be the one who wonders at it all...

Jesus sets his face to go to Jerusalem. It is in Jerusalem where his single-minded focus will display the reign of God on the Cross. Jesus does not shy away from entering the most disturbing and difficult places in life. God remains present to our needs in the deepest time of pain. Christ will not be distracted from this mission.

The purpose of the Cross is to reveal to all God's loving reign. So – 'let the dead bury the dead' is not a literal command – but an invitation to single minded allegiance. Christ is saying let's get on with the mission – let's not be distracted from 'proclaiming the Kingdom of God.'

Keep the main thing – the main thing:

"If you are going to put your hand to the plow – don't look back – keep going!"

In other words those fit for the kingdom keep the main thing the main thing.

What happened to the lifesaving groups is that they lost their sense of mission. They became self-serving rather than other serving. Maintaining the building became more important than rescuing the loss. Pleasing the members of the club became more important than being present to those coming in from sea wrecks.

We learn from Christ's single-mindedness that we as God's people are to keep the main thing – the main thing. And what is the main thing for Gloria Dei Lutheran Church?

The main thing is on the front of our brochure:

'Following the path of Jesus...rebuilding a community of faith'

Following the path of Jesus is a path of Jesus:

Rick Barger in his book – A New and Right Spirit – puts it this way:

"If God has indeed raised the crucified Jesus from the dead, and if the tomb is indeed empty, the spirit that lives within a congregation will invariably be hopeful, thankful, joyful, honest, and expectant. The leaders and the people will collectively reflect such a spirit."

We do live in difficult times for the church and all of society. Yet God is up to something in this pregnant time. God is summoning us in this time of transition and rebirth—drafting us to be church – namely the body of Christ here and now. That means urgent change and transformation:

- It means dying to hopelessness and defeatism and rising to a fresh new life;
- Dying to worrying about or obsessing over numbers, and rising to passion for authenticity;
- Dying to self-absorption, and rising to passion that reaches others with Christ and attends to the poor,

powerless, and disenfranchised with the compassion of Christ that has no boundaries;

- Dying to saying, "We can't!" and rising to asking, "Why not?"

Christ set his face to go to Jerusalem and he calls you and me today to set our face to God's mission:

"Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?

Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?

Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known,

Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?"

Amen