

## **“Face Set Toward Jerusalem”**

Luke 9:51-62

When the days drew near for him to be taken up,  
he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

And he sent messengers ahead of him.

On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans  
to make ready for him; but they did not receive him,  
because his face was set toward Jerusalem.

When his disciples James and John saw it, they said,  
“Lord, do you want us to command fire  
to come down from heaven and consume them?”

But he turned and rebuked them.

Then they went on to another village.

As they were going along the road, someone said to him,  
“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.”

To another he said, “Follow me.”

But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead;  
but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

Another said, “I will follow you, Lord;  
but let me first say farewell to those at my home.”

Jesus said to him,

“No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back  
is fit for the kingdom of God.”

## **Face Set Toward Jerusalem**

Luke 9:51-62

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Rev. Michael P. Catanzaro

### **I.**

UGH! Say it with me, *UGH!* I will tell you right now, this is NOT the scriptural text or sermon topic I want to be preaching on today...at ALL.

- Jesus set his face to go toward Jerusalem!?! Really?!?! *UGH!*
- Disciples urging a consuming fire on a town!?! *UGH!*
- Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head!?! *UGH!*
- Let the dead bury their own dead!?! *UGH!*
- No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God!?! *UGH!*

The hard fact is, this is the best of the four lectionary passages for this Sunday. So, I guess in some sense, we should consider ourselves fortunate, it could be much worse; and it still might. No way we want to hit this head on, so we're going to have to come at it in a roundabout way.

### **II.**

To do so, let me tell you a few stories; each is true and all from this past week. Consider them teaspoons of sugar to help the medicine go down. The first has to do with the memorial service we had this past Friday at the church for Marty Lyon; more specifically, the luncheon which was held afterward in Fellowship Hall. After more than two years of COVID, it was an absolute delight to have the church abuzz with activity again. In the days leading up to the set-up Pat and Ellen were fussing in the kitchen, making trip after trip in and out of the church, having earnest conversations and laboring with a joy that is to be admired. Come Thursday morning, an eager crew arrived before 9 a.m., got the tables and chairs set up, and then the skill-position people commenced to lay down table clothes, put out the place settings, meal amenities, punch bowl and even flowers on the table. That old Fellowship Hall of ours was pretty as a picture.

### III.

Friday morning I arrived early at the church to print off the liturgy and homily for the service, and moseyed up to the kitchen; *just* in case they needed the pastor to get “involved” with something (they didn’t). Food was being prepped, punch prepared, crust was coming off the sandwiches, food cut, plated and being put in bowls; cookies arranged, salads tossed, sliced deli meat rolled, condiments set out; and, I watched person after person walk in with dish after dish: fruit, veggies, salads, casseroles, cupcakes; you name it, a veritable feast.

After the service, Christa’s family and friends proceeded immediately to the buffet everyone had worked so lovingly to prepare; then young and old began to fill their plates, to gather at table to enjoy the meal and to reminisce and remember Marty. It was a tremendous show of affection support offered to the Lyon family. It was wonderful, it was heart-warming, it was an instance of many hands put to the plow and not once turning to look back. With those hands belonging to Jim, Lynne, Cameron, Rich, Jean, Pat, Linda, Arvilla, Vern, Ellen, Pat, Georgia, Faye, Barb, Rob, Emily, Kate, Carolyn, Georgia, John, Martha, Susan, Leah, Sarah, Rita, and Al.

### IV.

I’m not sure if this morning when you arrived here at church, you noticed the two big piles of brick pavers stacked up along the curb on the sidewalk across from the park? I put those there; which is story number two. They used to be set in the ground around the two big trees directly in back of the piles. This past Monday we had a final walk-through with the contractor who did the tree work, Michael Cliff (a former Park kid, now grown, who did a terrific job) and a representative from the DEC, Steve Sherwood, as it was a DEC grant which funded the work (to the tune of almost \$28,000). The contract signed by the Mayor called for the village to remove the bricks from around those trees so Michael could aerate the soil and mulch. Apparently, someone didn’t get the memo so Michael, Steve and I were standing there trying to figure out how to finish this last bit of work standing in the way of Steve signing off, Michael getting paid and me getting by box checked. So, I walked over to my car, grabbed my gloves, and started digging, cleaning and stacking; and Michael went and got some mulch.

## **V.**

As for story number three, on your way home today take a look just past the piles of pavers and see the small, white flags laid out around the picnic table directly between the street and the fountain. This past Wednesday I put those in the ground, along with Tyler Locke, the contractor who did the fountain (Tyler is also the grandson of Gene and Shirley Seeley, and he grew up here in our church). Starting tomorrow (I hope) there will be a hole dug, concrete pad poured, and red, brick pavers installed on top to form a flat surfaced patio with a sidewalk running down to it from the street which will allow a person in a wheelchair to sit at the accessible picnic table so everyone can come and enjoy the park and fountain. All of this is to happen by this coming Friday. Not only that, but when the concrete is poured for the pad, Tyler is also going to pour small blocks to serve as the base for the 7 new park benches which are currently assembled and sitting in village barn on Lincoln Street. Again, the hope is to all this done by Friday.

## **VI.**

The installation of the patio, sidewalk and benches have been in the works since last fall, right after Beth Hayes helped us to secure a \$5k grant to pay for it all. What has been holding up the works is the inability to source the same pavers which were used around the fountain. So, Wednesday, after we laid out the flags, Tyler gave me a sample brick and the square footage we will need and I started making phone calls. Frustrated, I finally just hopped on my motorcycle, with the paver in the saddlebag, and started driving around to building supply places. I made six stops and finally found some at Lowe's. I would much rather buy from a local business rather than a big-box national chain, and they are not as thick as the ones we had used for the fountain, but they have the 1500 we need in stock, they match in color and style, and with the poured concrete base they should work just fine.

## **VII.**

The other thing that happened last Monday while Michael, Steve and I were doing the walk-through, was the final three trees which had been slated for the Park (two magnolias and a Norway spruce) were being planted by the DPW. The week before the village had graciously agreed to send a truck and driver down to Auburn to pick them up after I made a short-notice arrangement with the nursery, and Diane Ladison quickly got us a check to pay for them.

This is story number four, but it is only half the story. When I placed the order for the trees and got the transportation arranged, we didn't have the money to pay for the trees; I was acting on faith (actually, I was going to put it on my credit card with the hope of getting reimbursed at some point). Thankfully, miraculously, the next day I drove out to Janet Favro's place with paperwork for the Brick Chapel Church, and stayed to spent a lovely half hour with her sitting on her porch just talking. When I got up to leave, she gave me a contribution to the Park which, you guessed it, covered the cost of the trees, with a little to spare.

For the past few weeks (years, really) I've been driving myself (and others) *hard* to get all of this DONE. Though Linda will tell you I've been more than a little bit maniacal, I prefer to think it more as a case of having my face set toward the Park in order to finally wrap-up this multi-year endeavor to repair the fountain, tend to the trees, and refurbish the Park.

## **VIII.**

The fifth story I have to tell you has to do with an email I received Friday from a young man who is a member of the Canton Sustainability Committee asking if it would be ok with the church to bring a portable compost bin to the Park on Market days to accept compost, and to serve as an educational/awareness tool. I've known this person for quite a few years, and though I don't necessarily know him well, I've always considered him a good lad. Just the fact that he is involved and trying to bring positive change speaks for itself.

However, I did a web search to ascertain the other members of the committee and was chagrined to see a couple of folks who haven't been particularly supportive of the church's stewardship of the Park and, at times, openly critical of the church in a way that was very unconstructive and, if I'm being frank, a cowardly. I'm sure it was no accident he was the one selected to make the request, though I'll bet you \$100 he is unaware of the reason he was given the task.

So, I've been thinking about this all weekend and, frankly, feel a great urge within me to command a consuming fire to come down from heaven by giving them "what for." Finally, though, I decided it will be best to just *move on*, to take this young man at his word when he says he'll be personally responsible that the compost will get taken away each day, all in the hope that the

exercise will foster a better spirit of community and cooperation (not to mention saving a few banana peels from the landfill).

## **IX.**

Now, all of these stories have certainly caused us to take scenic route to today's scripture passage, and we didn't even make it all the way around as the past week fell short of a story to illustrate the dead to bury the dead or the Son of Man having no place to lay his head. I hope, though, that you will begin to see the lessons this passage from Luke chapter 9 is trying to teach; even if they were lost on the disciples at the time.

Essentially, this passage is trying to teach us about Jesus' attitudes toward the future, the present and the past. If we are going to choose to follow Christ and be his disciples we must prepare ourselves for a *future* which will require more rigor from us than we can possibly imagine. We need to trust our *present* circumstances, and come to believe that all the details of our everyday lives will sort themselves out, or be sorted out by God. Finally, we need to make sure we are not stuck in the *past*, cling to old ways of doing things or get trapped by prior relationships which keep us from moving ahead in our faith and with the work of our faith.

## **X.**

Instead, we are being asked to undertake something *much* more difficult: to set our faces toward a symbolic Jerusalem, and commit ourselves to whatever manifestation of that Jerusalem God is calling us to bring about here on the Park in Canton, New York. In today's text, Jesus makes it clear that we have a *choice*. Let us give ourselves over to serious consideration of our future, of our present, and of our past; then, together, make a choice which is both wise and filled with grace. Amen.