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Trinity Presbyterian Church – Pensacola, FL
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INTERVENTIONS: 2. A Change of Course

Luke 9:51-62 Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Jesus “Set his face to go to Jerusalem.” “Set his face...”, i.e., he decided to go, he resolved to go, he set his course...to go to Jerusalem. Jesus knows what awaits him in Jerusalem – opposition by the religious leaders and ultimately his crucifixion on the cross. Yet he is determined to carry out God’s will and to achieve our salvation and new life.

Through Samaria: The most direct route from Galilee to Jerusalem is due South through Samaria but avoided it and detoured around Samaria. There was a centuries-old quarrel; between the Jews and the Samaritans, and the Jews considered Samaritans unclean, so they did not pass through Samaria less they be polluted. The Samaritans in turn did whatever they could to hinder Jews passing through their regions and attacked and injured any pilgrims passing through their territory. Jews avoiding Samaria would be like driving from Pensacola to Nashville, TN and rather than drive straight up I-65, you drove around Alabama through Georgia and drove to Chattanooga before turning back West toward Nashville!

For Jesus to take the direct route through Samaria is unusual, he knows it is hostile territory and to expect to find hospitality in a Samaritan village was also unusual. Basically, Jesus was extending his hand in fellowship to a people who were sworn enemies. To no one’s surprise, the villagers don’t receive Jesus because he is focused on Jerusalem; the Samaritan’s rejection of Jesus is a precursor to his rejection in Jerusalem. Not only do the Samaritans refuse to offer Jesus hospitality, they also slap away his hand. James and John feel justified then in offering to call down fire from heaven to blot out the villagers who reject Jesus, but Jesus intervenes. He saves the disciples from themselves, from their own intolerance. God will save whoever God chooses to save!

Jesus changes the course for his disciples: Jesus shows again to his followers that he desires to take his ministry to those despised half-Jewish heretics. Jesus has already ministered to Jews and Gentiles, to social and political and ritual outcasts, and now he extends that gospel to the Samaria! Once again Jesus shows that no person, no church, no denomination, has a monopoly on God’s truth and grace. God desires that no person should perish but that all persons should be saved through God’s grace in Jesus Christ!

In our culture today, with our competing and defiant narratives and pronouncements and affiliations and philosophies and styles of living, the wideness of God’s mercy ...indeed, *the wildness* of God’s mercy..., must be seen in our ministries to people different from us, beyond us, other than us. We tend to expect God to intervene on behalf of people like us and to act against people in whom we find fault; but God does not see as we see, nor think as we think.

Sometimes, when God intervenes, it is to redirect us, to challenge our false assumptions, to show us a more gracious way of living, a better way, that is best for ALL of us, not just us.

It takes humility to accept that kind of correction...when Jesus alters our course.

James and John want to call down fire on the villagers, their enemies,
but Jesus wants love, forgiveness, mercy. And he asks that we follow his example.
No matter how difficult that may be.

Jesus reigns in his disciples' misguided anger, by simply moving on to the next village.
You can't win over all people....

You may not win today

You may not be the right person; someone ELSE may be better suited to this village, this task, this endeavor, and maybe the village will be more receptive to his/her efforts.

It's humbling to realize...and to accept...that maybe it is US that God is correcting.

What then are we, are you, am I, to do with that correction?

What and why and HOW am I to change the course I was set on pursuing?

To what new Jerusalem must I now set my face?

Following Jesus means altering your course to want God's will more than your own plans.

Gladys Aylward was a young housemaid in London when heard an evangelist preach on serving God with your whole life. Gladys felt a calling to serve as a missionary to China to spread the gospel to the millions of people who had not heard about God's love or about Jesus Christ. She was told she would have to attend missionary training school first, which she did. But the mission agency broke the news: they did not have the money to send her nor did they think she was qualified for service in China. She felt compelled to go and began to save the little money she earned as a housemaid, confident that God would help her pay her way. In 1930, at age 30 years old, Gladys Aylward left for China. She could not afford to go by ship, so she rode the long train ride across Europe and Russia.

Japan was warring with Russia and China, and her trip included several narrow escapes amid war zones. She finally reached Yangchen, China, and took up work at an inn run by a retired missionary lady who taught Gladys to read and speak Chinese. The mission agencies had been sure she lacked the education for that! Sharing the Gospel in the surrounding villages, Gladys began to take in unwanted children. Before long she had 20 little ones under her roof, these in addition to the 30 to 40 wounded soldiers that she cared for at a time, and eventually she was caring for 100 children.

Gladys spied on the Japanese, who put out a bounty for her capture--dead or alive. Reluctantly she had to leave her beloved inn, narrowly escaping the bullets of her pursuers. She led her 100 children over the mountains on foot--a perilous journey of over a 100 miles to the safer province of Sian. After 27 exhausting days and shivering nights she brought her children safely into Sian and collapsed. How had she made it? The doctors were amazed at this woman, who was suffering from typhus, pneumonia, relapsing fever, malnutrition, and supreme

exhaustion. Once she regained her strength, she resumed her ministry in this new region, sharing the Gospel in the villages, prisons and among lepers. Throughout her years in China her ministry was characterized by a humble dependence upon God in a steady stream of extreme circumstances.

At the end of her life Gladys wrote of herself: "My heart is full of praise that one so insignificant, uneducated, and ordinary in every way could be used to His glory for the blessing of His people in poor persecuted China." Gladys was a small, shy, poorly educated woman, but she trusted that if God was calling her to the mission field, then He would equip her for the work.

Amazingly, here's what Gladys Aylward said about her ministry: "I wasn't God's first choice for what I've done for China. There was somebody else . . . I don't know who it was--God's first choice. I don't know what happened. Perhaps he died. Perhaps he wasn't willing. And God looked down . . . and saw Gladys Aylward." (Adams)

Gladys Aylward felt like she had so little to offer God. But when she sensed God calling her to give her life to mission work in China, she resolved to go no matter what it cost her. She set her face toward Jerusalem. She wanted to follow God's plan for her life rather than her own.

Excuses. The Samaritans rejected Jesus, Jesus' disciples wanted to call down fire from heaven to devour the Samaritans – but Jesus stood in their way and altered their course. Others made plans to follow Jesus – but only after they've buried their loved ones or made the appropriate farewells. But Jesus said no, he expects them to drop all their plans and follow him, because what he is doing is making a difference and if you can't see that enough to allow his call to change your plans, your hopes and dreams, to alter your course, then you don't have what it takes to be his disciple!

That's an unsettling question! Does Jesus make a difference in your life? I remember a bumper sticker and poster back in the 1970's when I attended Montreat Youth Conferences that asked, "If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" Again: "If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" Discipleship means living in such ways that God's grace and mercy and love changes your life, alters your course; not that you shape your faith to fit the life you already have planned.

Jesus never hid the demands of God's kingdom from those who wanted to follow him. Following Jesus means setting your face toward Jerusalem. No higher priorities, No turning back. Putting your hand to the plow and moving onward, onward, to what God is doing, what God is willing, what God is achieving. You don't plow a straight furrow looking back over your shoulder, looking backward, thinking wistfully about the good old days.

Jesus calls us to move forward, to pursue his kingdom and his righteousness,
to make disciples of other people, to make a difference in peoples' lives and our community.

Are you confident that the future is in God's hands?

Would that make a difference in your life, in your aims and goals and desires?

Setting your face toward Jerusalem means submitting to God's will fearlessly and pursuing the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!

Sometimes that's easy ...sometimes it's difficult, it means giving up your own agenda and comfort to follow God's will. For Jesus Jerusalem meant humiliation, crucifixion unto death.

But for you and me, for humanity, Jerusalem meant salvation, forgiveness and reconciliation with God, and life everlasting!

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life!

Do you love God enough and trust God enough to change your course and to set your face toward Jerusalem, too?

If you do, you will know the power and presence of God in you and the peace of God that passes understanding,

and the providence of God that will guide you and deliver you to the place God has planned for you and the work God for which God is preparing you!

Thanks be to God! Amen!

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