

Luke 9:51-62

4th Sunday after Pentecost

June 28, 1998

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

After years of preparing, the moment was drawing near.

To what might we compare this moment? A general deploying the troops for the deciding battle? An accountant studying for the examination to become a CPA? A woman and a man practicing, preparing for the moment when she will give birth to their first child?

Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem - the city of the temple where the one true God was worshipped.
Jerusalem - where Jews from around the world gathered to celebrate the passover.
Jerusalem - where Pontius Pilate was the hand at the end of the long arm of Rome, the strong arm of Rome.

Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem.

Jesus sent messengers ahead of him - like scouts spying out the hostile territory before the army was to invade. A village of the Samaritans would not receive him because his face was set toward Jerusalem. James and John, who were nicknamed the sons of thunder wanted to send in the bombers. "Do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?" But Jesus rebuked them.

This was not an army that would follow a scorched earth policy. For the goal of this march was not destruction, but peace. Reconciliation. A gathering of the chicks under the wing of the mother hen.

They found another village in which to spend the night.

Along the road someone said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go." But 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 volunteer to march along with him. But Jesus wanted him to know that they would be living on K-rations. Sleeping on the ground, no pillow, not even a tent.

To another Jesus 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." In the battle that was coming Jesus could not afford soldiers whose hearts were divided. This battle was to the death, *nothing else within the staff must be what would be the result of the battle.*

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." *for the sake of the kingdom you must not look back.*

The trial of Jesus whole life was coming, he would be tested beyond anything he had ever before faced. Jesus needed those who would not run away when torches came out of the darkness of the night bringing soldiers to arrest him. Jesus needed those who would not lose courage to speak when their master was bound hand and foot and they were alone among the enemy. Jesus needed those who would never betray him for money nor out of fear.

But you know how it was with those who followed. One betrayed, another denied, all ran away. And Jesus was left alone to face all the hostility. Jesus was left alone to be stripped naked and mocked and shamed. Jesus once so sought out that there was no time to even eat, so desired that people took off the roof of a house to get inside

to Jesus, Jesus whom people had followed out into the wilderness just to hear him speak, now was received with only whips and nails and darkness. All the selecting of followers, all the teaching and the preparing and planning and Jesus was left with no one nor anything to show for it. Not one was found to be fit for the kingdom of God, every single one had put their hand to the plow and looked back.

What shall I say today? That we are any different? On the day of my confirmation I stood up and said, Lord, I will follow you. And I gladly follow whenever we are out on some green hillside and five loaves and two fish are multiplied by God into a feast. But every time the torches come out of the darkness of the night I run.

I run back into the arms of fear.

~~The arms of God.~~ The arms of fear. When Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem he knew he was in the Father's arms. And though the disciples and you and I have fled from those arms again and again, Jesus reaches out to pull us back to the Father. For in the arms of fear there is only terror, an endless fleeing, every day a thousand deaths. But in the arms of the Father there is life. Even in the midst of shame and suffering and death there is life.

For Jesus has made you fit for the kingdom of God - you who have deserted in the heat of battle, you who have put your hand to the plow and looked back, you who have been more concerned about a pillow for your head than for the Lord. He died and was raised for you.

So that you might always be present & today we are on the side of God, the safe in the arms of God.

*For the sake of all the world...
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