**Luke 9:51-62 (ESV)**

51 When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. 53 But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. 54 And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” 55 But he turned and rebuked them. 56 And they went on to another village. 57 As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” 58 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.” 59 To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” 60 And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” 61 Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” 62 Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

**“Focused on Christ”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. The summer months bring about much traveling by people. Everyone knows it takes a certain amount of focus to get from one place to another. Being prepared is helpful, but who is truly ever ready to face what is in store on a trip? There can be road construction, a flat-tire, bad weather, flight delays, missing luggage, and other hang-ups along the way. Yet, despite these circumstances, there is something to celebrate when arriving at your destination. This is even more so the focus of Jesus as Savior. Nothing was to get in the way of His sacrifice for a sinful world. St. Luke stated, “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

There was never any missed turn by Jesus on His way to glory in the cross, but not so much with his disciples. Having sent messengers ahead, James and John interpreted rejection of the Gospel as a time for judgment, which they gladly would dish out upon the Samaritans. However, Jesus rebuked such actions as losing focus of faith in Him. The same distraction might be true for us with the Supreme Court last week striking down the Defensive of Marriage Act concerning gay marriage. Even so, just two days prior to this ruling was the commemoration of the Augsburg Confession. It is in many ways the “constitution” for what it means to be Lutheran. Our Fathers did not use force against the corruptions they faced in Church and State. Instead, they confessed the Gospel in its fullness fixing their hearts and very lives upon Christ. In facing opposition, Jesus focuses His saving work on us so we might follow Him in a fallen world.

Three examples in our text show where true opposition remains for any disciple. Baptized into the Saving Name of God has promised complete salvation by the Gospel. Yet, faith never boasts in itself being able to follow by its own strength. Jesus replied to the first disciple, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” In this world, there is no endgame to it all, no permanent shelter and no peaceful ceasefire for those in Christ. The Church has bounced around from culture to culture and continent to continent. Like a ship without a harbor, Jesus’ disciples float on the seas of an ever-changing sinful world. It is one thing to promote doing good, but quite another to have hospitality toward the Gospel. This more than challenges the wallet, but changes the foundation for what it means to have a satisfying life. Who of us dares to boast of such things built on sacrifice that must come from self?

Likewise, when calling another disciple to follow him the man wanted time to tend to other important matters. Jesus was not denying him the right to have a funeral for his father. However, the relations we enjoy and even respect at the present is not the same as being a part of the family of God. There is a bigger purpose standing above the cares of duty and tradition with earthly matters. Jesus does not deny them, just like he honored His mother Mary. Yet, He does show the degree of importance saying, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” There is far greater worth in the Word of God than what we make of worldly concerns, which only pass away. “Eulogies, flowers, rites don’t soften the harsh reality of death. Nor will sentimentality. What counts is preaching the Gospel far and wide” (Bul’s notes 8). Who dares to speak such glory given for all in Jesus Christ before death brings only silence?

Again, the last disciple is like the first desiring to follow but has personal interests in the way. Jesus calls him to task challenging his priorities and values as distractions. “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” It is one thing to set cruise control in a tractor when planting and still get straight rows. This does not happen with the Gospel for it demands our undivided attention. It is easy to get off course stumbling into sin and false idols. St. Paul said, “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” The temptation to “look back” means lacking confidence in what God does for us in Christ. It means those straight rows are not so straight after all in our lives because we sin. This happened to Israel wanting to go back to Egypt. It fell upon Lot’s wife turning to look at the loss of Sodom and Gomorrah. Who dares to hold fast to the righteousness from God and never look back when nothing appears right in the eyes of man?

The cost of being a disciple of Christ is high and comes at great price. If it were up to us to achieve none would find a place in the kingdom of God. Except, One dares out of love to follow through with what He boasts about as Savior. Jesus setting his face to Jerusalem makes His faithfulness known for all. None would be hospitable to Him who would crown His head with thorns. Nevertheless, his sacrifice invites a sinful world to repent and believe in Him until the end of time. The cross appears to go nowhere and yet Christ has made it His hidden glory in this world. As the Psalmist stated, “Righteousness will go before him and make his footsteps a way” (Psalms 85:13). By His sacrifice, baptism is the place that holds this righteousness of Christ beyond the shifting sands of a sinful world. St. Paul declares, “…he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit…” (Titus 3:4-5).

Equally important, is the fact that Jesus speaks words of life leaving death to have none to bury. The prophet Elijah saw the threat of strong winds, earthquakes, and fire that all men fear. Yet, the lowly whisper of God’s voice is what held all authority of life. This is the authority of Jesus, the Word become flesh, who speaks forgiveness for sinners. He says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live” (John 5:25). The voice of His absolution removes the threat of death and judgment upon life. He speaks forgiveness all the way to His cross because death has a master. Jesus’ Word promises where there was death life is now at work. St. Paul says, “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” Confidence of the Gospel comes with a confession, like our Lutheran Fathers, to stand against the silence with the Word of life.

At last, this kingdom of God comes by Christ alone unable to waver from being Savior. There are no distractions for He died and rose never losing focus. This is what He is still set upon doing for us today by His true body and blood in the Sacrament. The Father does not look back on a fallen world, but forgives it with the faithfulness of Jesus. No other righteousness apart from Christ lasts regardless of how good it may be in this world. As our Lord said, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). God has plowed out a perfect way to place all trust in the Gospel. This righteousness does not go to the right or left, but centers on the cross. It is the kingdom of God fit for sinners to make them saints by the saving Name of Jesus. Christ calls us back by his faithfulness so we in turn faithfully serve God and our neighbor. This freedom to love does not let any go off course, like the sad decisions of our deteriorating culture. Christ remains Savior and Lord of His disciples with a love sustained by the Word.

Like going on a trip, no matter how bad the travel might be our salvation is secure in Christ. The writer from Hebrews tells us, “…let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:1-2). To lose focus on the Gospel leads us only into a multitude of distractions devised by the Devil. God has promised there are far better things to come in Christ. At the present, our glory hides behind suffering but only allowing faith to abound even more from the Word and Sacraments. In facing opposition, Jesus focuses His saving work on us so we might follow Him in a fallen world. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.