

Sunday's Sermon

GLORIA DEI LUTHERAN CHURCH

250 Fox Hill Road ■ Hampton, Virginia 23669

June 26, 2022

The Reverend David E. Fox

Third Sunday after Pentecost (Year C) 2022

Luke 9:51-62

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

When we arrived in North Dakota, it was summer time. We had plenty of time to acclimate to the weather. It also gave us plenty of time to educate ourselves and prepare for our first winter in the frozen tundra. We had to buy parkas for our bodies and block heaters for our cars. We had to buy snow boots for our dog and pack survival gear for when we traveled.

Folks who were native to the area, forgot we had never dealt with such cold weather. However, after bringing it to their attention, they were happy to give their advice. They told us that at twenty degrees below zero, your skin could freeze and that if you didn't cover your mouth breathing the cold air could damage your airway and lungs. We were told to bundle up if we had to go somewhere in the bitter weather.

They told us that the first part of winter and the last part of winter were the most dangerous times to drive because of ice. If the temperature was close to freezing, the ice was dangerously slick. Once the temp dropped so far down below zero, the ice would crust over and you then had traction once again.

It was definitely dangerous up there because of the extreme cold; but the other thing that could happen, could happen even in the month of May – “white outs.” White outs are when a blizzard comes and is so bad you can't see two feet in front of your car. All that you can see is white from all the snow blowing in every direction possible.

We experienced several of these, and unfortunately we found ourselves driving in these conditions on more than one occasion. One of the best pieces of advice that were given about driving in a blizzard or “white out” was “Never stop moving forward; no matter if you're going fifteen miles per hour, keep moving.” There were times where it seemed like the best option was to pull over and wait it out, but that would have probably ended with either someone hitting us from behind or by being buried in the snow and then the chance of carbon monoxide poisoning from the exhaust of the car. So, we followed the advice of “Never stop moving forward; no matter what.”

In our gospel reading for today, we have Jesus setting his face to go to Jerusalem. And we all know what is in store for Jesus at Jerusalem – the cross. The Greek translated more literally here is that Jesus is setting his face to journey to Jerusalem. That word, journey, shows up four more times in this short passage: the messengers that Jesus sent were journeying as they entered into a Samaritan village; in verse fifty-three, we are reminded that Jesus was journeying into Jerusalem; then in verse fifty-six, the messengers and Jesus journeyed into another village. In the next verse, Jesus and the messengers journeyed on the way and a certain person began to talk to Jesus.

There is a lot of movement in these verses. Jesus seems to always be going forward, toward his goal of Jerusalem. Jesus never stops journeying towards his goal. In fact, he tells the third person who says he will follow Jesus, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God.”

Jesus not only leads by example, but he also expects his followers to keep journeying on to the goal without turning back to the past. In my mind's eye I see Jesus telling us, "Never stop moving forward toward your goal; no matter what." And then I see him adding a clarifying statement that says, "And be sure to know what your goal is so that you aren't spinning your wheels."

Brothers and sisters, there seems to be an epidemic happening in churches where they have found it to be rather difficult to "look ahead" or to move forward, because they seem to be content with where they are or are obsessed with the good old "glory days."

If a church is content with where they are, those are the churches that are happy they can pay the bills month to month. If a church is obsessed with the past, they have created an idol or idols that they worship that have been long gone never to return.

It is easy for us to get stuck in being content and worshipping our past, but Jesus is calling us to evaluate where we might be – to take the time to journey together to form a vision of what I like to call "Where in God's Name are We Going?" and then journey together towards that goal in which God is calling us.ⁱ

People of Gloria Dei, are we stuck in our past, spinning our wheels? Or are we journeying together to what God would have us do. Are we listening to the sound advice of "Never stop moving forward; no matter what" to achieve the goal that God would have us meet?

Personally I think we have come a long way in our journey together. We have indeed been moving forward these past 18 months. Sure, there is still quite a bit of the "Glory Day" idol worship of how things use to be. However, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we've set a vision for our congregation to follow with our Annual Roadmap, extending through next April.

With Christ as our way, we have begun to set a vision and begin our journey to become a positive force in our community, by building up our outreach through H.E.L.P. and the homeless; to bridge the church and school communities by sharing our faith with students, teachers, and families and increasing our communication and interaction with our school staff.

With Christ as our way, we want to seek out and use the gifts of people of all ages with focusing on our youth by empowering them, developing the program, and growing the program; and we want to focus on our faith groups by going on spiritual retreats and developing small groups for people of all walks of life.

With Christ as our way, we want to build strong healthy relationships among our members, and to do this we will work to equip and nurture our members, communicate our vision, and mentor others to step into serving roles.

Where else might Jesus be calling us to journey? What other goals might Jesus want us to tackle? Whatever it is that we are called to do and be a part of, we have to "Never stop moving forward, no matter what." We have to continually look ahead, because that's where Jesus is.

Sisters and brothers, Christ is calling us to journey with him. Christ is calling us to journey with him to the cross; to a place that none of us really want to go. Christ is calling us to continue in our journey of outreach, relationships, and sharing our vision, even when it seems like a challenge that we don't want to face. Christ is calling us to journey forward with him as our guide. Our goal is in our mission statement: *Building Faith, Building Community and Building Lives*. And the only way we are going to get there, with the help of Christ, is to "Never stop moving forward, no matter what."

ⁱ <http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/luke9x51.htm>