

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: Beautiful People Leave Beautiful Traces

Lesson: Luke 9:51-62 NRSV

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. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to prepare for his arrival, ⁵³ but they did not receive him because his face was set toward Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ When his disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" ⁵⁵ But he turned and rebuked them. ⁵⁶ Then 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, first let me go and bury my father." ⁶⁰ And Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." ⁶¹ Another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." ⁶² And Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

There was a parade in Clear Lake yesterday. Even before the parade started, people had gathered on Main Street, each brought their own chairs, sat down and waited for the parade to begin. The parade started with the Veterans. Veterans started out the parade with cheers and applause from the crowd. Next came Fire trucks. My son is two years old now and he loves cars. His favorite of the cars are Fire trucks. When the fire trucks appeared in the parade, he was so happy that he took his mother's hand and continued to follow them. Next, EMTs and city bands and ladies passed by waving their hands. Oh right! They threw candy and passed where we were watching. Our son was busy picking up those candies.

As the beautiful people passed by leaving candies to people, a Korean saying came to mind: "Beautiful people leave beautiful traces." In fact, this saying is used differently depending on the situation. For example, if you are in Korea, you will see that saying mainly in public restrooms. Yes, that's right. If that saying is used in the bathroom, that means "Please keep the bathroom clean." However, I remembered that saying literally when I saw beautiful people and little cuties leaving candy and treats along the parade route. And a couple of questions came to my mind. As a Christian, and a Methodist, and a pastor what am I trying to leave in this world? And what can I leave behind in this world?

And, I think this question seems to apply to all of us here. Friends, as a Christian and as a Methodist, what are you trying to leave in this world?

I thought about life while watching the parade. A parade has a beginning and an end. All participants go from their starting point to their ending point. There is no return to the starting point halfway through. Our lives are similar to parades. There is a starting point called birth, and there is an ending point called death. We are all on our way to an end on the road of life. No one can go back to the past. We only live in the present. So, how should we live as Christians and as Methodists while we live on this earth? And what should we pursue and what should we try to leave behind?

Luke 9:51 is a very important verse because it shows that Jesus' decision to go to Jerusalem. Let's read verse 9:51 together: "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem." After this verse, Jesus' journey to Jerusalem will be described over ten chapters. Jesus' decision to go from Galilee to Jerusalem means that he will fulfill God's promise by dying on the cross, resurrecting, and ascending into heaven. There are several ways to get from Galilee to Jerusalem, but the fastest route is through Samaria. So, Jesus and his disciples decided to go to Samaria. His disciples had tried to enter a Samaritan village ahead, but the Samaritans blocked the way.

The Samaritans did not receive Jesus' disciples because there was a deep historical conflict between Jerusalem and Samaria. Both the disciples and Jesus were Jews. So, the Samaritans did not receive them. Then James and John ask Jesus an arrogant question: "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (54) At this time, Jesus tried to avoid conflict with them by rebuking the disciples because for Jesus, the Samaritans were the object of salvation, not the object of judgment. And then, they went on to another village. What Jesus wanted was the salvation of all lives. So, he always chose the path of peace. And he also asked his disciples to choose the path of peace.

Jesus demands intense and perfect devotion from his disciples, at least about the kingdom of God and the work of God. When someone decides to follow Jesus, Jesus asks: "Are you sure you can? Think again." Even when someone wants to bury his father and follow Jesus, Jesus tells him that proclaiming God's kingdom comes first. And when someone said he would follow Jesus after saying farewell with his family, Jesus said: "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." (62)

What Jesus was trying to say is the order of priority. He is speaking of the principle that one should not cling to one's past or self-centered thoughts before God's work. Following Jesus and believing in Jesus is not easy. No, it's very difficult. It is a narrow road, and it is not the road welcomed by people. Therefore, the way of Jesus requires a firm determination. You need to be determined to walk this path with Jesus.

Prophet Elijah asked his disciple Elisha the same question three times before ascending to heaven: "Elisha, do you really want to follow me?" and "Elisha, do you really want to live as my disciple?" At that time, Elisha consistently answered Elijah, "I won't leave you." Elijah looked at Elisha's solid resolution and asked: "Tell me what I may do for you before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." When Elijah ascended to heaven, Elijah's life, his way, and his mission were inherited by Elisha.

Beautiful people leave beautiful traces. Siblings in Christ, what are you trying to leave in your life? How are you struggling to follow the life of Jesus in your life?

What all Christians should try to leave behind on this earth are the fruits of the Spirit: 'love', 'joy', 'peace', 'patience', 'kindness', 'goodness', 'faithfulness', 'gentleness', and 'self-control'. We must all strive to bear these fruits. We need to put these into practice in our neighbors. Each of you may have your own range of neighbors. For some, the scope of neighbors may be one's self; For some, the scope of neighbors may include their family, for some, the scope of neighbors may include their same village, for some, the scope of neighbors may include Wisconsinites; or even the world. We need to gradually expand the scope of our neighbors. And we must strive to put into practice what Jesus taught us. Therefore, following Jesus is not an easy path. However, it gives our lives meaning, joy, happiness and love.

I hope we all have questions in our minds like "How do I put into practice what Jesus taught me in my life?", "What am I trying to leave in this world?", "What would Jesus do about my small and big conflicts with others?", "What would Jesus do to embrace and love the marginalized in this community?" I hope all of us have your own questions and seek answers to them. If you already have the questions, try to practice it for a week, and if you don't have any questions yet, make them up and we'll gather here next week with your questions.