

"Invited into the Journey"

Galatians 5:1; 13-25 & Luke 9:51-62

June 27, 2010

Christ has set you free! That is the Word of God. That is the life that you have been called into. The question is simple Will you join in that journey to freedom?

It sounds good doesn't it? Freedom is what we desire. It is freedom that we have fought for as a nation and which we will celebrate next Sunday on July 4th. We prize freedom as highly as any thing in our lives. And even though it seems as though it is a contradiction, what our 2nd scripture reading for today suggest is that if we want to be free we have to live under the law. Will you join on the journey to freedom by being bound to obeying the law? The law is simple And it is the most difficult thing that we will ever do. Love God and love your neighbor as yourself. That is how Jesus described the whole of the law. Paul shortened it in our reading today to simply say that we are to love our neighbor as yourself. Will you join in the journey to freedom by loving your neighbor?

We in the church like to pick on the ancient Pharisees by pointing out the fact that they made all kinds of ridiculous laws that the people had to live by. But the reality is that they had nothing on us. I read this week about a couple of men from England who traveled to the United States in 2005 for the specific purpose of breaking the law. *They went to a hotel room in Los Angeles and peeled an orange, breaking an antiquated law. They traveled to Globe, Arizona, and played cards with a Native American. They went whale hunting on a lake in Utah. The two traveled to Illinois and fished on the banks of Lake Michigan in their pajamas. The pair drove around the town square in Oxford, Mississippi, more than 100 times in a single session. In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, they slept on a refrigerator. In Albany, New York, the two travelers played golf in the streets and in Hartford, Connecticut, they crossed the street walking on their hands. In all, they broke 18 laws during their seven-week crime spree. They were never arrested.* Of course there are many important laws that guide us in being good neighbors and help us to live together in peace. I would never want to diminish the importance of keeping the various laws that are so important for us as we live together. But living by the law of Christ is not about avoiding peeling oranges in certain locations or sleeping on refrigerators. It calls us to join Jesus on a journey to Jerusalem. It calls us to walk with Jesus toward the holy city ... The new Jerusalem where we will stand in the presence of God.

It is interesting to note that our Gospel text for today is the beginning of a long narrative that is referred to as 'the journey to Jerusalem'. Jesus has begun His ministry - called followers, healed and performed miracles, and taught new things about God. Now He understands that He must follow the will of God and that will lead Him to Jerusalem. Here the Gospel text notes that He sets His face toward Jerusalem and over the next several months we will read about that journey. But today, Jesus invites us to join Him on that journey. He notes that the journey will not be easy. He suggests that if you join Him on this

journey toward the freedom of life in God, you will not be able to simply settle in anywhere in this world. There will be nowhere that you can call home because everywhere we go is dominated by the ways of the world and not the ways of God.

Jesus knew how hard it would be. He could imagine people asking why ‘why can’t I do all of the things that everyone else is doing? Why can’t I just get comfortable with the world and still walk with you? Fox have holes and birds have nest But you, the children of God can not allow yourself to get sucked into the comforts of the world because the journey to Jerusalem and the throne of God is a hard road on which we can not afford to become lax.

Will you join Jesus on the journey to freedom? Sure, I want to follow Christ. Freedom sounds good to me. God is my guy. Sign me up. But first, let me take care of a few things. I got some good-bye’s to say, some projects in the works, a vacation scheduled, a few wild oats to sow You know - nothing big. But they are all important and Well, I’ll get back to you later on that journey you want me to go on with you Jesus.

The Gospel text sounds harsh in many ways. Why couldn’t a person stop and take care of some good and important business.

In one article, the author said this: "Frankly, none of us are going to make the cut to follow Jesus. Our desires for soft pillows and comfortable beds, for fulfilling family and social obligations, will frequently have higher priorities than following Jesus -- especially following Jesus all the way to the cross. We might be willing to give up some evils in our lives to follow Jesus, but to give up all these good things -- to put them as a lower priority than Jesus? That is radical ...,"

I suspect that many of you have heard the story of the college professor who set out a gallon sized glass jar in front of his classroom one day. As the students watched he placed stones from a pile he had near by into the jar until it was clear that he could not get another stone into the jar. He asked the class if the jar was full. Everyone agreed that it was. That was when the teacher took out some smaller stones and dropped them in. They rattled down into the spaces between the larger stones. The professor asked again ... is the jar full. The students had caught on and they said no. The professor took a handful of sand and poured it in allowing it to drift down between the spaces. And finally he took a pitcher of water and poured that over the top. The professor asked the students, "What is the point?" One suggested that the point was that no matter how full your schedule is there is always room to add one more project to the schedule. NO! The point is this: "If you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all. Hmm. Jesus says, "Follow me." BIG rock. We respond, "I will follow you, Lord, but..." Priorities. Get the big rocks in first."

There will be time and place for family, friends, and fun. But join the journey with Jesus first. First love God and neighbor - get the big stones in first. Those big stones will reshape your relationship with the people in your life and in your world in a very positive way. Unfortunately we are so anxious to take care of everything else in our life before we put God into the picture. And then unfortunately, there is often no room left for God on the

journey that we are taking. When we set aside the call to love God and our neighbor until another day we are soon surrounded by broken relationships and the pain of the world. Big rocks first. Love God. Love neighbors. Follow Jesus on the journey.

He is out there calling us to follow. Follow Christ to freedom - it is that simple and clearly the most difficult thing we will ever try to do. But Jesus keeps calling. He led the way. He opened the gates. In love He gently calls for us to join in the journey to freedom.

AMEN