

What's Stopping You?

[Galatians 5:1,13-25](#)

[Luke 9:51-62](#)

Last week we identified two important questions, “What is your name?” and “What are you doing here?”

Building on those two questions “What is your name?” and “What are you doing here?” I asked you what your special name from God might be. Maybe God calls you “Crazy Brave”, “One with the sunset”, “She who cooks open hearts” or “Greatly Loved.”

Today we have a new question to consider. What is stopping you? What is stopping you from fulfilling the name that God calls you?

In the gospel story today, Jesus has set his face toward Jerusalem. In other words, he has determined that the time has come for him to face his final confrontation with the religious authorities, and with the powers of darkness. He is going to fulfil the name that God has called him. The whole of his ministry has been leading up to this, and now it is time.

Not realizing this, the disciples go to make the normal travel arrangements for him but nothing goes right and they can't get the people in a Samaritan village to provide hospitality. This seriously upsets James and John who in accordance with their name “Sons of Thunder” threaten fire and brimstone, until Jesus tells them to calm down and they keep on their journey toward the conclusion of Jesus' earthly ministry.

Then there are three incidents with potential disciples: the first one says he wants to follow Jesus and instead of Jesus being pleased, he replies, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." I wonder whether there was something that he saw in this person's willingness which was not authentic. There are many reasons that people decide to start a spiritual path and they are not all spiritual. Some people hope it will make them feel better. Others hope that they will be better liked or respected or loved. One gentleman called me to ask whether if he came to church he'd find a new wife.

Or maybe Jesus figured that this person needed to understand more fully what he was taking on. It wouldn't be a glamorous or easy life. In fact you have to be “Crazy Brave” to be a disciple.

The second potential disciple says that before following Jesus he must bury his father. Jesus replies, “Let the dead bury the dead.” I don't for a minute think that Jesus is saying his disciples should not bury their relatives and grieve over them or that we should not attend funerals. I suspect that Jesus is telling us that in order to be able to fully proclaim the kin-dom of God we have to let the past be past. Many of us are carrying the past around with us. We spend time and energy thinking about what has happened. Most often these are not happy thoughts of pleasant summer vacations. Most often they are thoughts of things we think we did wrong, or things that people did to us, or tragedies that came out of the blue. These are things that weigh us down.

The third would-be disciple also has something he wants to tidy up before he follows Jesus. "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Let me get everything sorted out, then I will come. The words of a procrastinator.

What is it that you are putting before following Jesus? before you follow the call which is in the name God has given you?

What is stopping you from turning your face and your intention toward the fulfillment of your ministry?

Is it that you are afraid? Afraid that you may have more of the crazy than the brave? Are you unwilling to leave the comforts of the life you know for a life of loving God and your neighbor as yourself? Yes there may be sacrifices along the way, but the reading we heard from Galatians celebrates our freedom, freedom *from* guilt and shame, and freedom *for* life-transforming behaviors. The way of the Spirit opens us to the world in all its diversity, frees us from ego and individualism, and inspires us to bring greater unity and community to the world.¹ As Jesus says 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' (Matt.11:28-30)

Or are you, like the second candidate, holding on to the past? Sometimes we define ourselves by traumas we have experienced or disappointments we have had. We long for healing, but we hold on to what is not life-giving. It is as though we are walking around carrying a bag of resentments and painful memories. These drag on our energy and make it more and more difficult to life in the kin-dom. Our burdens limit us so instead of having energy to follow Jesus' call, we are weighed down.

In Galatians, Paul says "Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want." So often this passage has been interpreted narrowly as having to do with sex, but I want to suggest to you that it has as much to do with our mortality and the limitations of being human – being flesh – as it has to do with what we do (or don't do) in bed. The flesh, my friends, desires to hold on to the past. The way we have lived, the things we have eaten, the accidents we have had, the adventures we have experienced – all these things are etched into our bodies. I can tell you stories about how I got this scar on my finger, or how my shoulder became detached from my collar bone or how my digestion gets messed up when I eat certain things. We all have these stories. Our flesh holds on to the past.

But our minds and our spirits need not. That is the secret of forgiveness. Forgiving myself and forgiving others allows me to experience the healing of memories. And then, as I let go of the burdens of the past that I have been carrying around I become free to follow the possibilities of my calling. I become free to fulfil that special name that only I and God know.

¹ <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/livingaholyadventure/2019/06/the-adventurous-lectionary-the-third-sunday-in-pentecost-june-30-2019/>

But maybe you keep putting off the next step on your spiritual path because you have to get everything sorted out first. Once I have done this or that I will focus on my spiritual life. Or “once I have changed this behavior or conquered that addiction, then I will be ready.” My friends, the time is now. It is today that Jesus calls you to step on the path or step further along the path. Set your face for Jerusalem, for the fulfillment of the ministry that only you can undertake.

We live in an open-ended universe. The way things will turn out depends upon the choices we make and the way that we co-create with God. When each one of us is living out our full potential in the Spirit then the kingdom of God is manifest in our midst.

I cannot finish this sermon without a shout-out to all the thousands of gay, lesbian and transgender people who have turned their face towards their own Jerusalem; those who refused to give in fifty years ago at Stonewall Inn; those who came out when it was dangerous to do so; those who over these decades have stood up to the religious authorities; those who have heard the name that God calls them and have said, Yes! I will be the person that God made me. And a shout out to those who continue to do so today in places where there is great personal cost and even danger.

God is calling you to be fully who you were made to be. God is calling you to live out the name that you have been given. What is stopping you?