

Today we read a couple of short stories from the gospel according to Luke. It has been said about the gospel of Luke that within it “Jesus promised His disciples three things—that they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy and in constant trouble.” Personally, I find myself very drawn to this sentiment. Perhaps in my own discipleship I might come to find myself fearless, joyful, and yet in constant trouble. I want to take time to explore in depth what it is these two brief stories from Luke say about our call to discipleship, and the specific challenge that they offer. Upon a first reading, it is not very clear how these two passages from the gospel of Luke fit together, or how they could possibly share a message. First, we see Jesus turned away by the Samaritans on his way to Jerusalem where he shall enter Heaven body and spirit. The disciples are clearly very upset that Jesus was turned away by the Samaritans and immediately turn their sights towards judgement, which causes Jesus to rebuke them. Next, we see a series of people who desire to follow Jesus, but two of them say something along the lines of “I want to follow you Jesus, but first I have to _____”. Jesus’ response to both of these individuals is “what you should be doing is serving the kingdom of God”.

The similarities between these stories very much rest in the reactions of Jesus. Throughout these stories, Jesus’ vision remains on his mission as the Messiah and his understanding of the kingdom of God and the fact that it is imminent. The Kingdom of God for Jesus is not something distant for which we prepare, but something that we are actively building here and now. And through this stance of Christ, we are called to much the same understanding. The message that is present throughout both of these short stories therefore is this: First, that Jesus’ messianic intention is serious, and it is full. There are no half-measures for Christ. And then second, in a sense, the calling to which the faithful are called is no less full. To be “fit for the kingdom” is to be committed as fully as possible, to set our own faces toward Jesus, and to not turn away, no matter how ugly things may become. In other words, as testament to the way that Jesus calls us, we are challenged to put faith first.

And so, I ask all of you along with myself, when was the last time you put faith first? I know for myself; it seems like something that is easier said than done. I am often like those who said to Jesus “that sounds great, but first I need to _____”. It is easy for faith to become something that is targeted at ‘one day’ instead of ‘right now’. Or perhaps the greater truth of it, at least for myself, is I know that putting faith first also means relinquishing control, and that is a huge challenge.

But, as we look at reaffirming our call to put faith first, I want to share a quote from C.S. Lewis: “Put first things first, and second things are thrown in. Put second things first and you lose both first and second things.” Put faith into this equation and it becomes: “Put faith first, and other things are thrown in. Put something else first and you lose both faith and everything else.”. What this speaks to me is this: Putting faith first is not merely a step towards “the day of something greater” but it is, as its core, a step towards connecting us to the here and now. To me it also means that putting faith first does not mean that nothing else matters, but it means that everything is seen and enacted through the lens of faith. A lens primarily built on mystery, and love. When we put faith first, we are still compelled to reach out and form relationships, but how we form these relationships and what they are built upon will change. We are still called to work, but how we work and why it is that we work shifts.

When we put faith first, we trust in God. To put faith first is to know that we will receive all the love we’ve ever needed; we will understand the mysteries that have haunted us; we will

be washed clean in the arts of ourselves we don't know exist; we will see the face of God. Putting faith first is still very much a challenge, but I still want to pursue this end, because of the great beauty it seems to hold.

So, my friends, let us try together as individuals and as community you put first things first; to put faith first. Fortunately, human beings are not concrete sanctuaries. It is never too late to rearrange our priorities. At our center is the ability to change and grow. We are on a life-long journey of faith that will always be dependent on prayer and practice. And so let us pray together for continued faith, and the courage to put faith first:

God the Creator, help me today, to find faith in these trying times. Often, I have no idea where my life is headed. It seems like my life is spinning out of control most times.

Situations come my way that I cannot face, decisions need to be made and I do not know which is the right choice.

Obstacles seem insurmountable, enemies seem unbeatable. I feel scared and alone.

But God... You are the author and finisher of my faith. I trust you with my entire heart at times and yet other times I find my faith dwindling. I find it hard to muster that mustard seed of faith. Loving Parent, today I pray for renewal of my faith.

Even though my future seems uncertain, I will look to you, I will keep my eyes turned to you. My spirit would be at rest knowing I do not have to be in control when I put first things first.

Amen.