

Introductory

The first part of this reading (vv. 51-56) is exclusive to Luke. The second part (57-62) has a parallel in Matthew (18:19-22). None of the material from either writer is appointed to be read in the TLH one-year lectionary. In LW and in LSB, this is the appointed text for Pentecost 6C, and portions of the Matthew parallel are read on Pentecost 16 and 17 in Series A.

Following the rather abbreviated excursion across the Sea of Galilee, Jesus returns to Galilee, where He is met by a waiting crowd. Luke tells us that He then resurrected the daughter of Jairus and healed the woman with the issue of blood. He then commissions the twelve and feeds the five thousand. Peter makes his Great Confession, at which time Jesus talks for the first time about what the future holds.

He is then transfigured, and when He comes down from the mountain, he casts a demon out of a boy and begins to talk again about what is coming, the trip to Jerusalem and crucifixion. They didn't get it, and in fact they began to argue about which one of them was greatest among them. Now, in the ninth chapter of Luke, for the third time Jesus talks about Jerusalem and the cross,

He "sets His face" towards Jerusalem. Unlike many modern preachers, Jesus never promises "health and wealth" to those who follow Him, at least not until they get to heaven, where they will have both in abundance. Unlike many modern preachers, who are often very well off, Jesus had no earthly possessions.

If you look at the map in the back of your Bible, you will note that to get to Jerusalem from Galilee, the best route will pass through Samaria; home of the Samaritans. UBD describes the Samaritans as

a mixed race with a heathen core (Ezra 4:2). Their blood would become more and more Hebraized by the addition of renegade Jews and by intermarriage with surrounding Israelites, who would find among them the familiar worship of former times." (*Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 1977, p. 958)

We note that the "surrounding Israelites" would have already been of mixed race as a result of their being forced by the Assyrians to intermarry with non-Israelites in the eighth century B.C. The attitude of James and John, who wanted to do what they wanted to do, to whom Mark gives the moniker "Sons of Thunder," would not have been uncommon among the Jews of that day.

Textual Notes

Incident at a Village

51. Holy Week approaches; "Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ συμπληροῦσθαι τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς ἀναλήμψεως αὐτοῦ - it came to pass in the fulfilling of the days of His being taken up." Almost all of the

translations make the noun " ἀναλήμψεως " into a passive verb, talking about Jesus being "taken up" or "received." Others translate it as "ascension," which is the primary meaning.

BAG says that this NT hapax "can also mean death," which makes a lot more sense here, since that's what awaits Him in Jerusalem, with the Ascension to come much later. Some of the commentaries talk about the noun in the context of the resurrection, and can we not talk about a rising from the dead and then a rising up into heaven in the Ascension, like Art Just does?

The "filling" language is common in Luke, and it's about time, and He knows it, and knowing it, "αὐτὸς τὸ πρόσωπον ἐστήρισεν τοῦ πορεύεσθαι εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ – He set His face to journey into Jerusalem." The verb "πορεύεσθαι – to journey" is in the present infinitive, and Voelz reminds us that "Tense does not indicate time; rather, it indicates *type of action*..."

The present infinitive conveys 'connected' action, the aorist 'simple' action" (*FGG*, p. 107). The journey upon which He is embarking is connected with the identity of whom Jesus is; because of Whom He is, He will do the work He does. The pronoun "αὐτὸς - He" is not needed, and as well as the infinitive mood, serves to emphasize the personal nature of this odyssey.

This is the first of three times in a few verses (51, 52, 53) that the word "face" is used. There's a lot of action and especially interaction going on with the face. The face is the location of the eyes, nose, and mouth, and the ears are not far behind. With those perceptions – add touch (skin), the face is very sensitive – we perceive what's going on – or not – in front of us.

If something important is going on not in front of us, we turn to face it. On the other side of that coin, we are recognized by others when that other person sees each of our unique faces. Facial recognition is a thing. Those same organs: the eyes, mouth and nose – in turn reveal something to that person about us, what we are thinking, what we are feeling, and the like.

On a very basic level, because of its location in the front of your head, unless you are walking backwards, your face is going to be pointed in the direction you are going. The eyes are particularly important in that regard. With the eyes, you see what's ahead. With the nose, you smell what's ahead, with the ears you hear, and you even feel things like the wind in your face.

Knowing the nature of that journey, "He set His face," a Hebraism – it's an idiom, and one that comes down to us today – "implying fixedness of purpose, esp. in the prospect of difficulty or danger." (Reineker, p. 168, from Plummer) Jesus is heading for Jerusalem, the cross, and death, with a dogged determination that we often associate with an athlete or a hard worker.

52. The description, "ἀπέστειλεν ἀγγέλους πρὸ προσώπου αὐτοῦ - He sent messengers from in front of His face" sounds a lot like a description of the sending of the Apostles, and in fact we see that two Apostles, James and John are among the sent ones. The twelve "πορευθέντες εἰσῆλθον εἰς κώμην Σαμαρειτῶν – journeyed into a village of Samaritans"

As noted above, the face is very personal. You can look at a lot of body parts on different people, and they look pretty much the same. Not the face. A person's face is unique, and you can tell more about a person by looking at his face than any other part of the body. They would have been looking at a face that was "set for Jerusalem," and what would such a face look like?

Here, the word “face” is in the genitive case, meaning motion away from, and the emphasis here is on their going away from Him. He wants them to go from Him into the village, “ὥστε ἐτοιμάσαι αὐτῷ - so as to make it ready for Him.” Just what did they *do* to “make ready” the village for Him? The verb “ἐτοιμάζω – make ready” occurs forty times in the NT.

It is used in connection with John the Baptizer preparing the way for Jesus, for the preparation of a regular meal, the preparation for the Passover meal, and of the spices to be placed on the body of Jesus. The preparation probably involved a conversation probably centered on the question of proper worship being offered at Mt. Zion or Mt. Gerizim, like with Well Woman.

Pulpit Commentary has a good description of the Samaritans,

These Samaritans were the descendants of a, mixed race brought by Esarhaddon (eighth century B.C.) from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, to replace the ten tribes carried captive to the East. These became worshippers of Jehovah, and, on the return of Judah and Benjamin from captivity, sought to be allowed to share in the rebuilding of the temple, and then to be admitted as Jews to share in the religious privileges of the chosen race. Their wishes, however, were not complied with. They subsequently erected a rival temple on Mount Gerizim, and henceforward were known as a schismatical sect, and continued in a state of deadly enmity with the orthodox Jews. This bitter hatred is noticed in the New Testament (see [John 4:9](#)), where it is stated that the Jews "had no dealings with the Samaritans," whom they looked on as worse than heathen. In the synagogues these Samaritans were cursed. The Son of Sirach named them as a people that they abhorred (Ecclus. 1:25, 26); and in the Talmud we read this terrible passage, "Let not the Samaritans have part in the resurrection!" This hatred, however, we know, was not shared in by our Lord, and on more than one occasion we find him dealing gently and lovingly with this race. Luke 9:52

53. Regrettably, “καὶ οὐκ ἐδέξαντο αὐτόν, ὅτι τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἦν πορευόμενον εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ – and they did not receive Him because His face was traveling into Jerusalem.” That may be a double entendre, or not. The idiom that has Him doggedly facing what faced Him in Jerusalem was off-putting to those looking for an earthly king.

You can make that case – and probably in many Lutheran pulpits the case will be made – that the rejection here is because of the cross at Jerusalem, but there's no reason to believe that these people even knew about the cross. Right before this (vv. 22, 44-45), He had talked of it, but only to His closest followers – who don't seem to get it – but these Samaritans did not hear it.

More to the point is the issue Josephus talks about, how Samaritans did not mind Jews passing through headed north – away from Jerusalem – but did not like them going south – towards Temple in Jerusalem. They had Temples in their neck of the woods, and for Jews to not be going to their temples but insisting on going to the one in Jerusalem – they did not like that.

It was like the Jews, by insisting on going to Temple in Jerusalem, were saying that there's

something wrong with their northern temples, and they were. Once, on vacation, we got into an ELCA by mistake. The usher invited me to Communion. I shook my head “no,” and he insisted. I said, “no,” and he touched me on the shoulder, goading me to the Sacrament.

It was like that, and yes, as a matter of fact I am saying that because of your doctrine your Sacrament isn't – well, it's not that it's not good enough for me. It's that I don't want to be mistakenly identified as adhering to the horrible doctrine you espouse. And they don't like that, and it was like that, only with the Jews and Samaritans at the time of Jesus it was much worse.

Well Woman talked about that whole issue. For Jesus and the twelve to cut through Samaria would be along the lines of a modern-day Israeli traveling in Jordan, or a Palestinian cutting through Israel to get to Jordan. Normally, you just didn't do it if you could avoid it. He did not avoid it, and because of that non-avoidance we learn more about God, Jesus, and Samaritans.

54. It does not say that the Sons of Thunder were the messengers or among the messengers who went to the village, but “ιδόντες δὲ οἱ μαθηταὶ Ἰάκωβος καὶ Ἰωάννης εἶπαν Κύριε, θέλεις εἰπωμεν πῦρ καταβῆναι ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἀναλῶσαι αὐτούς – seeing, the disciples James and John said, ‘Lord, we should call down fire from the sky to consume them?’”

The question from them to Him seems – to them – to be rhetorical; it's a given that Jesus would want to rain down fire as a matter of course. Their request was not without precedent. A cursory Internet search reveals that God sends down fire from heaven more often than you may think, most famously on Sodom and Gomorrah. But I don't think that's what's going on here.

Of all the sendings of fire in the OT, the one that most closely fits the bill here is Elijah calling down fire on men who were sent to kill him, as recorded in 2 Kings (1:1-16). Ahaz died, and Ahaziah took over, and he got sick. He sent messengers to ask the Baals if he would get better or not. Elijah met those messengers and sent them back to the King, who was put off by that.

King Ahaziah sent a Captain and fifty men to fetch Elijah, and Elijah proclaimed to the sent Captain “If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty,” and fire did just that. A second Captain with fifty more men came, and they were likewise consumed. By the time the third Captain and fifty came, the lesson had been learned.

If this were a movie, fire would be called down and the special effects would be great, and the bad guys would be destroyed and the good guys would triumph, and everything would be nice and clean. But it's not a movie, and that's not the way things work now. Later on (Acts 8:14ff., Philip, Peter and John the Apostle took the Gospel to several villages of the Samaritans.

Some make a lot of tolerance hay out of this exchange, talking about how Jesus is teaching His disciples about religious tolerance, and it doesn't matter which religion you belong to, they're all good. But Jesus doesn't think like that or teach it. All He's doing here is denying permission to call in a fire that would have consumed and destroyed the village and its surroundings.

55. No, that's not what He wants them to do; “στραφεῖς δὲ ἐπετίμησεν αὐτοῖς – turning, He rebuked them.” Speaking of His face, He points it at them – like a teacher or a parent faces a student or child who is about to be rebuked – and then does just that. The word for “rebuke” is used in Luke with bad things as the object, in this case a bad idea is rebuked.

A surprising number of translations add the variant, " Οὐκ οἶδατε οἷου πνεύματός ἐστε ὑμεῖς – don't you know that we are not of that spirit." The phrase is found in several manuscript families, including the Textus Receptus, but not well-supported by modern textual scholarship. Having said that, Jesus' rebuke possibly would have sounded something like that. It's true.

56. Those variants add, " ὁ γὰρ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἦλθεν ψυχὰς ἀνθρώπων ἀπολέσαι, ἀλλὰ σῶσαι – the Son of Man does not come to destroy men, but to save," which is also true, but not in the most reliable manuscripts. So nobody called down anything, they went on to another village, and Matthew begins to parallel Luke with a shorter version that adds detail.

And they went on to another village, because with limited resources you should not be spending too much time banging your head against the wall with people who are prejudiced to you and are not going to listen to a word you say. Perhaps something about missionary work and what the LCMS calls “witnessing” can be gleaned from the incident described here.

Would-Be Followers

57. Before they reached that other village, Luke tells us that " πορευομένων αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ εἶπέν τις πρὸς αὐτόν – as they went that way somebody said to Him" making to Jesus a very open-ended offer; " Ἀκολουθήσω σοι ὅπου ἐὰν ἀπέρχῃ – I will follow you wherever you should go.” The approach comes after the calling of The Twelve and before The Seventy.

The promise to follow is a very firm statement of intent, and the adverb “wherever” and the conjunction “if” and the verb in the subjunctive mood are the words that communicate that the man is good to go, ready for whatever it takes to become an Apostle for Jesus. Because of the word “follow,” I don’t think the man is wanting to just become a mere disciple (a Christian).

If you look at the way the word “ἀκολουθέω – to follow” is used in the NT (Gospels), it almost always, if not always, is used in connection with Apostles, who are disciples (Christians), but who have also been chosen personally by Jesus into the Apostolic Office. The modern-day equivalent is Christians chosen by the Church into that same Office.

58. The offer seems to come from a good place, it never actually says whether or not the man got thumbs up or down, but I don’t think he made the cut. In the normal way of things, it is Jesus who chooses Apostles and not Apostles who choose Jesus. We note that Pastors are the ones who choose to go to Seminary, but that’s the last choice they make in that regard.

From then on, other people decide if you are to actually do things like pass your courses, pass vicarage, graduate from seminary, be placed, get ordained, get installed, and the like. After that, congregations or calling bodies choose or do not choose you off of a list compiled by your District President, and only after you have been called do you choose thumbs up or down.

So we don’t know what became of the man, but we do know that Jesus responded to the man's words by pointing out His earthly poverty; foxes have dens in which to live, and birds have nests, but He does not know from night to night where He will sleep. When Jesus tells people to leave everything and follow Him, He is speaking to us as one who has done just that.

59. Along those same lines of Jesus being the one who decides who is to be chosen for the Apostolic Office, enter another man, to whom Jesus says " Ἀκολούθει μοι – follow me." The

verb is a present imperative, a command with emphasis on the connection of the command to the person. The Twelve have already been sent out, and The Seventy are about to be appointed.

The man to whom Jesus extends this invitation excuses himself by saying that he will follow after his father dies. Since it was presumably the moral obligation of the son to see to his father's burial, this seems like an acceptable, even a noble reason not to follow Jesus, at least at this time. Perhaps in addition or instead the father would disapprove that vocation for his son.

60. Jesus isn't buying it, and He tells him to "Ἀφες τοὺς νεκροὺς θάψαι τοὺς ἑαυτῶν νεκρούς – let the dead bury their own dead," but "σὺ δὲ ἀπελθὼν διάγγελλε τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ - You, go announce the Kingdom of God." The "you" is emphatic, and the verb " διαγγέλλω" occurs only three times in the NT, and it means the public declaration of factual information.

61. Again, we are not told whether or not that man ended up actually following Jesus or not, and now yet another offer from a would-be follower who wants to initiate his own apostleship, "Ἀκολουθήσω σοι, Κύριε – I will follow You, Lord," but who asks permission to "πρῶτον δὲ ἐπίτρεψόν μοι ἀποτάξασθαι τοῖς εἰς τὸν οἶκόν μου – first bid farewell to those of my house" .

The verb " ἀποτάσσομαι – to bid farewell" is used six times in the NT, and it seems to be more formal and more final than a simple "goodbye." Robertson says of this farewell that "it is thus a formal function and this man meant to go home and set things in order there and then in due time to come and follow Jesus" (WP). Compare and contrast this response with that of the fishermen.

They were all small businessmen who were needed for the functioning of their businesses, but when Jesus said, "follow me," immediately dropped their nets and followed Him. Not just anybody can or should be a Pastor, and many are culled on the way to Seminary, at Seminary – especially on vicarage – and even after ordination some fall from grace or just stop doing it.

62. Jesus responds to the offer by pointing out that the plowman who looks back is a foolish plowman, and "εὐθετός – not fit" to run the plow. To plow in a straight line, you must look forward all the time, not backwards ever. If you look backwards even once you not only ruin that row, but several rows after it. Did you know that John Deere has stopped manufacturing plows?

The adjective " εὐθετος – fit" is used here and two other times in the NT. In 14:35 it is used to refer to salt that has lost its saltiness, and so it is only "εὐθετος – fit" for the ground or the dung hill. It is also used in Hebrews (6:7) to refer to crops that are "εὐθετος – fit" for the use for which they have been planted. The word has to do with a thing's usefulness or suitability for the task – or not.

A Christian convert who is constantly going to be looking over his shoulder at his former life, and be distracted by it, is not the kind of material that makes for a good Christian, and he will make an especially poor pastor, and what are you going to do about it anyway? The Church has chosen us for Ordination, and she tells us where to go – or not – and our reward is mostly in heaven.

Law/Gospel

Old Jerusalem/New Jerusalem - Jesus is headed for the Old Jerusalem, the place of Temple, the Priesthood, and all that those things entail. It is the geographical center of Judaism, and a

place with which He is very familiar. It is also the place where His own people, led by His religious leaders, will railroad Him and turn Him over to the hated Roman occupiers to suffer a horrible death by execution. The Old Jerusalem is filled with corruption and sin.

The New Jerusalem will be characterized by the absence of sin and corruption and all other evil. It will be a place of perfect bliss and, unlike the Old, the New will last forever. All of this happens because by His death and resurrection Jesus fulfills Temple, the Priesthood, and all that those things entail. He becomes the geographical center of the New Judaism. You might even say that the geographical center of Christianity is the Sacrament of the Altar, where Jesus is located.

Not Follow/Follow - Along the road between Samaritan villages, some are chosen to follow Jesus, and others are not. Some choose Him, but that didn't work then any more than it does now. Theologically, this is actually more of a Not Chosen/Chosen theme, because nobody follows Jesus unless Jesus chooses him to follow. Sermons with this theme tend to be heavy on the Gospel, and that's ok.

The natural tendency is to be heavy on the Law. Marvel that God has chosen us, without any merit or worthiness in us, and at all that His choosing entails. Go ahead and talk about Predestination and about how since it is God's choosing it's more certain than if it were ours. It's also helpful to remind the hearer that we don't understand everything about God (He's God, and we are not).

Calvinism's Double Predestination is reasonable and easy to understand, and its bastard child Synergism even more so. The biblical teaching of Single Predestination is neither. I think most pastors hesitate to preach the Gospel of Single Predestination because we don't know for sure that every single hearer is a Christian and we don't want to comfort and assure a person who should not be. At least that's why I was hesitant to do that.

But when Paul tells the Ephesians that God "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" he does not seem to be concerned that a hypocrite or unbeliever might read it. Preach the Law and preach the Gospel and let God sort it out. Oh, and this just in; Synergism has won the day in America. Maybe we should pile off the Catholics for a while and pile on the Synergists. Start with William Graham. You know, like in prison, you go for the biggest, baddest dude first.

(For more information on Monergism, go to the "Monergism" article at Wikipedia. It's actually pretty good. Or you can look at AC XVIII, like Wikipedia tells you to...)

Fire/Fire Withheld – Because of our sins we, like the Samaritans, deserve the fires of Hell. Because Jesus “set His face to Jerusalem,” we escape Hell for Heaven.

NB: It's okay to have more than one Law/Gospel theme in a sermon.

Sermon Titles

Face Set Towards Jerusalem

Fire from the Sky?

How to Plow a Crooked Row

Hymns

Jerusalem the Golden – LSB 672

Come, Follow Me, the Savior Spake – LSB 688

Behold, a Host, Arrayed in White – LSB 676

Lift High the Cross – LSB 837

Hail, Thou Once Despised Jesus – LSB 531

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