

Fifth Sunday of Trinity 2016 Godfrey Hilliard

Think back in history. What have been some of the greatest journeys of all time, journeys that have changed the world? You might think of Columbus sailing the ocean blue in 1492 to the New World. After weeks and months of sailing, when some sailors thought he would surely go over the edge of the world, Columbus found land and waded ashore. Or you might think of the great journey of Apollo 11 to the moon: Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin descending in their lunar module to the moon's surface, and Armstrong stepping onto the lunar soil: "One small step for man, one giant leap..." This Sunday, we think back to the greatest journey of all time, a journey that was made in a simple pair of sandals. On this Fifth Sunday of Trinity, we remember the journey that Jesus began:

"When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem."

It was time for him to be taken up on the cross, taken down to the tomb, to be resurrected by the Father and eventually to be taken up in the ascension to the Father. It was time for him to be taken up.

So Jesus set his face for the journey. His decision had been made and there was no turning back. Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem, some eighty miles and four days south. He could have stayed in Galilee where he could have enjoyed a comfortable, respectable life as a Rabbi. But he chose to risk it all.

Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem, and the next ten chapters in Luke recount what happened on that journey: the parables and sayings, the unforgettable encounters, the stories and dinners that happened on the way. Through all of those things on the road to Jerusalem, Jesus was teaching what it means to be his follower. "All that Jesus teaches about justice, about the right use of wealth, about prayer and steadfastness in his cause, he teaches as he leads his followers toward a final confrontation in Jerusalem." (Neil Elliott, 2008)

Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem and as soon as he did, he found himself rejected. It was not the first time. After his baptism, Jesus had been rejected by his hometown. Now after his transfiguration, the Samaritans could tell he was headed to suffering and death, so they shied away from him as well.

Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem and as soon as he did, would-be followers came bragging that they would follow him wherever he would go. They had no

clue where he would go and where it would end up! In fact, they wanted to follow only under certain conditions but Jesus was blunt about the suffering and deprivation that would come to anyone who followed him. Jesus had no time for anyone who would slow him down: there was no time for anyone to tell a family goodbye, no time even to bury a father. Anyone who dared follow him had to drop what they were doing that moment, as he said, “No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

The days had drawn near for Jesus to be taken up. So he kept his face toward his destination and it was the greatest journey in history because it was the journey that saved the world. You and I made the journey here this morning because we believe that the greatest journey a person can make is the journey of following Jesus. After Luke told the story of Jesus in the gospel then comes the story of the church in Acts. The church, the followers of Jesus, went through the same journey in Acts that Jesus did in Luke. On that journey, the same things happened to them that happened to Jesus: rejection, deprivation, self-denial, sometimes even death. But the followers of Jesus counted it all a privilege to go through what Jesus did.

Certainly all of those early Christians had had other plans for their lives, but the Lord turned their lives upside down. Certainly all of them preferred comfort and safety, but the Lord led them through one risky situation after another. From my own experience I will share this with you. I did not want to be a priest- I wanted to be a fat cat lawyer but God had other plans and nearly forty years later here I am telling the tale!

On this Fifth Sunday of Trinity, we remember the journey that Jesus began: *“When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.”* (9:51) It was time for him to be taken up on the cross, taken down to the tomb, to be resurrected by the Father, and eventually to be taken up in the ascension to the Father. It was time for him to be taken up.

After Luke told the story of Jesus in the gospel, then there was the story of the church in Acts. The church, the followers of Jesus, went through the same journey in Acts that Jesus did in Luke. On that journey, the same things happened to them that happened to Jesus: rejection, deprivation, self-denial, sometimes even death. But the followers of Jesus counted it all a privilege to go through what Jesus did. This is the greatest journey a person can do, the greatest adventure a human being can have. It will sometimes be painful, but it

will never be boring. It is a journey worth throwing yourself into completely, without ever looking back. Following Jesus is not easy and involves sacrifice and conflicts of priorities. In this passage we see that Jesus is warning against facile, unassessed enthusiasm, and half-hearted foot-in-both camps partial commitment. It could be argued that the church of today and the same type of people that promised so much to Jesus about their commitment to be disciples, show the same tendencies.

Jesus made the decision to go up to Jerusalem so he made a decision from which he could not turn back. Last Thursday, as a nation, we made a decision from which we cannot turn back. We are now on a journey that we may not have fully planned and we will meet hostility and obstacles, we will meet with agreement and disagreement. We may find that our decision as a nation will be welcomed by some and lamented by others. Some of us may be happy, others sad and only time will tell us if the journey was worth making or was a mistake.

At another pivotal moment in our nation's history, King George VI in 1939 at the outbreak of WW2, quoted the writer Minnie Louise Haskins;

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied:

"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way." So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night. And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East."

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In this morning's gospel Luke tells us about the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem and how the world was changed. We have thought about the journey of our own lives and how that has brought about change and so these words may give us comfort as individuals, as a church and as a nation as we move forward together.

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"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied:

“Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.”

In a world of uncertainty we need to go back to where we are safe and have a reference point in order to move forward. I can think of no better place for us all today than placing our hands in in the hand of God.

So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night. And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.”

Our two Archbishops have issued a statement that I would like to share with you.

“On Thursday, millions of people from across the United Kingdom voted in the Referendum, and a majority expressed a desire that Britain’s future is to be outside the European Union

The outcome of this referendum has been determined by the people of this country. It is now the responsibility of the Government, with the support of Parliament, to take full account of the outcome of the referendum, and, in the light of this, decide upon the next steps. This morning, the Prime Minister David Cameron has offered a framework for when this process might formally begin.

The vote to withdraw from the European Union means that now we must all reimagine both what it means to be the United Kingdom in an interdependent world and what values and virtues should shape and guide our relationships with others.

As citizens of the United Kingdom, whatever our views during the referendum campaign, we must now unite in a common task to build a generous and forward looking country, contributing to human flourishing around the world. We must remain hospitable and compassionate, builders of bridges and not barriers. Many of those living among us and alongside us as neighbours, friends and work colleagues come from overseas and some will feel a deep sense of insecurity. We must respond by offering reassurance, by cherishing our wonderfully diverse society, and by affirming the unique contribution of each and every one.

The referendum campaign has been vigorous and at times has caused hurt to those on one side or the other. We must therefore act with humility and courage – being true to the principles that make the very best of our nation. Unity, hope and generosity will enable us to overcome the period of transition that will now happen, and to emerge confident and successful. The opportunities and challenges that face us as a nation and as global citizens are too significant for us to settle for less.

As those who hope and trust in the living God, let us pray for all our leaders, especially for Prime Minister David Cameron in his remaining months in office. We also pray for leaders across Europe, and around the world, as they face this dramatic change. Let us pray especially that we may go forward to build a good United Kingdom that, though relating to the rest of Europe in a new way will play its part amongst the nations in the pursuit of the common good throughout the world.”

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Amen.