

First Presbyterian Church

Cheyenne, Wyoming

June 27, 2010

Worship Theme: "No Turning Back"

Luke 9: 51-62

One of my clergy colleagues shared with me part of his journey in his path to ministry. He remembered driving from Minnesota to Rock Island, Illinois to attend Augustana Lutheran Seminary. When he crossed the Mississippi River, going from Iowa into Illinois, he had that feeling that there was no turning back.

There are times in our lives when we are faced with a fork in the road. Which one are we going to take? And once we are on our way, there is no turning back. We may wish at times that we would have taken the other road, but none of us has the luxury of turning the clock back and taking that different road.

In Scripture, we are constantly discovering those who are guided by the Spirit to go a certain way, and to not turn back.

In the reading from First Kings, Elisha is called to follow Elijah.

Elijah leaves his oxen and his tasks as a farmer, and never turns back.

In the second reading, Paul writes to the believers in Galatia that they are now on a new path. They are free from slavery to law and ritual, but they are also called to a different life...a life guided by the Spirit, and not guided by their natural desires. They are freed from self-indulgence and a kind of desperate pursuit of self gratification: the list is pretty specific and sordid:

Idolatry, strife, jealousy, anger, envy, etc. etc. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit directs us to a new and different way of life. Here the list is hopeful and energizing: love, patience, peace, generosity, kindness, self control, etc. etc. Paul urges the Galatians, and us, to be guided by the Spirit. And for Paul, there is no turning back.

Finally, in the Gospel reading, Jesus is calling his disciples, and he makes it clear to them that following him is challenging and difficult. And again, there is no turning back. As we read the passage from the Gospel, we are listening in as Jesus teaches his disciples about how to follow in his way of compassion, forgiveness, prayer, trust, serving, and yes, suffering.

In the New Revised Standard version of the Bible, the one we use in our church, this section of the Gospel reading is titled "Would be followers of Jesus." It's one thing to mouth the words of

discipleship; it's quite another to actually become a disciple. And with the decision to follow Jesus, sometimes there is no turning back. Our life is different when we follow Jesus.

No longer are we just out for ourselves. No longer are we just our own boss. No longer are we free to simply do whatever it takes to satisfy our needs to get what we can, despite what that may mean for others. No longer can we abuse or use those closest to us. No longer do we follow other gods...the gods of self-centeredness, pleasure, wealth, and power. We are now guided by the Spirit, free to live for others, free to live in the security of God's love, so that we can love others as God has first loved us. There is no turning back. And, for those who are followers of Jesus, we really don't want to turn back. There is trust and faith in the future, not because we are so competent or powerful, but because we do not walk alone. Jesus said, "Lo, I am with you always, to the end of your lives...and to the end of the age."

There was an article in last Thursday's paper about the younger generation that appears less interested in traditional church. And that is true. There is not the automatic turning to the church by young people today as in previous years. Entertainment churches seem to draw the young, but for how long? There remains a call to those who want to really take Christ's call to discipleship seriously.

This past week, I visited with a young man, age 30, who is a follower of Jesus. He spoke of his life in his 20's where he was living in his car, he was drinking and seemed to have no future.

But he found that God had not abandoned him. He returned to his faith, is a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, and is dedicated to helping others as part of his discipleship. I was really impressed and told him he had a great life ahead of him.

His experiences, rather than condemning him, really gave

him credibility. And I really believe, for this young man, there is no turning back now. His life is now the gift it was meant to be in the first place.

God calls us to follow the Spirit. We can trust that promise. And for those who answer God's call, there is no turning back.

Thanks be to God.

Amen...and amen.