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6th Sunday after Pentecost
30 June 2013
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Luke 9:51-62

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Lutherans are known for being stubborn.
We're hard-headed.
And many of you are German, which just makes things worse.

We don't back down, we don't give in, we don't compromise.

Now, in many ways this is good.
We won't compromise on our Lord's Word.
We won't give in to the pressures and demands of this world.
We won't let go of our doctrine, our teaching—because it comes from Christ and *is* Christ.
As St. Paul said,

"I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

(1 Corinthians 2:2)

Obviously, though, there are ways we go wrong in our stubbornness.
When we're worried about being right we sometimes fail to love, and forgive, and show mercy.

In today's Gospel we get a glimpse of the stubbornness of Jesus.
His stubbornness is good because it results in our salvation.
But it would be very easy to look at Jesus' stubbornness and say,
"He deserved what He got."

Jesus has His face set towards Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is the city of David, the place of sacrifice and worship.
It's also the place where Jesus will go to die.
Jerusalem's the last stop, the city that will put Jesus to trial,
condemn Him, mock Him, beat Him, and crucify Him.

Now, there's every reason not to go to Jerusalem.
And yet it's to Jerusalem that Jesus sets His face.

The Samaritans in the gospel reject Jesus because they reject Jerusalem as a place for worship.
And if Jesus is bent on Jerusalem, they'll look for another savior.

As the reading goes on, Jesus encounters three people who would follow Him.

The first presumptuously says that he'll go wherever Jesus goes.
But the way Jesus responds suggests that this man views Jesus as another glory road.
The Jesus he seeks comes with popularity, prestige, and an easy life.
Jesus tells the man that His way is the lonely way.
He's not going to Jerusalem for honor and might, but to be rejected and die.

The second man is invited by Jesus.
But he says he's first got to bury his father.

Now, there's two ways to understand this:

first, the father has died and the son is making funeral arrangements,
which normally took place that same day;
the second is that the man wants to wait until his father dies before he leaves home to
follow Jesus—
could be months, could be years.

In either case, Jesus' response—though harsh—shows how radical the call is to follow Him.
The second man rejects the suffering that comes with a Jesus whose face is set toward Jerusalem.

Then there's the third man, who says he'll follow, but first he'd like to say good-bye.
This one rejects Jesus and His Jerusalem because he thinks he might miss out on something.

For each of these men, and for the Samaritans, there's every reason to avoid Jerusalem.

And that's how we think also.
We hate suffering.
We avoid it as much as possible.
We like our routines and our familiar faces and the same old sauerkraut and brats.
We're stubborn like that.

We complain about our knees and troubled backs.
We'll do whatever it takes to get rid of the pain.

Sometimes our suffering isn't so much in the body as it is in the mind, or the heart.
This sort of suffering we avoid by keeping it all inside, not saying what really think or feel.
We avoid the difficult conversations, and admitting that we might be wrong.
We cover up the painful past and anything that might hurt us now.

Some suffering we bring on ourselves, but some comes out of nowhere.
This happened in our congregation this past week.
Our Lord called His dear child Bentley home.

I can't imagine the suffering that Aarika is going through.
In fact, I don't *want* to imagine it.
It hurts—it's too real, too devastating, it's not fair.

Now, we may be tempted to avoid talking about this.
We may cover up the pain, or we might drown it down.
To lose a child can destroy a person's faith, and even her life.
And that's exactly what the devil wants.
He wants to destroy you.
And he'll do whatever it takes.

The devil knows that the best way to destroy a person is to rip them away from our Lord's word. He did that to Eve long ago, "*Did God really say...*"

He uses every bit of suffering with the hopes that you'll forget the Lord's promises. He takes the crosses we face and tries to wedge them between us and Christ. He knows that we already hate suffering, we hate the crosses, and so he promises *another way*.

In today's gospel, that *other way*, is anything but the Jerusalem way. Anything but the way of the cross.

Some of the excuses seem to be good excuses:
family, loved ones, safety, and tradition.

But what Jesus calls us to is sort of radical. It doesn't mesh well with the wisdom of this world. Jesus calls us to the cross.

St. Luke says,

"But the people did not receive Him, because His face was set toward Jerusalem."

(Lk 9:53)

The way of Jesus is the way of suffering;
it's the way of the cross.

James and John won't have any of this rejection—they say to Jesus,

"Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (9:54)

Whether they could actually do such a thing or not is beside the point—
Jesus rebukes them because they refuse to suffer rejection.

As disciples of our Lord, we must see all things through the cross.

We'll suffer, we'll hurt, we'll bury those who should be burying us.
Our family might reject us,
our friends might turn their backs,
and the world will always despise our message.

And yet Jesus says,

"But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." (9:60)

We can only make it through our suffering because Jesus' face was set toward Jerusalem.

He was so stubborn for the cross that He wouldn't let anything or anyone get in His way. He wouldn't take the easy road. He wouldn't wait until it seemed convenient. He wanted no glory for Himself, but that everything of His be yours.

The Lord set His face toward Jerusalem *for you*.

He did it so that our rejection of pain and suffering and bearing our own crosses,
might be overcome by His suffering for us.

This cross makes no sense to those who seek an easy life.
But for us, this cross is everything.
And what happened on that cross in Jerusalem long ago,
is now given out here today.

So whether we live, or whether we die,
whether we suffer, or whether things go well,
Jesus set His face to Jerusalem so that you would be His and He would be yours,
forever.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit