

Sunday, June 30, 2019 – Third Sunday after Pentecost/Morning Prior to O/I of Brad Wellik
“It’s Not Always Comfortable... but It Is Our Calling”

Luke 9: 51-62

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Frame and Refrain Structure

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

No one LIKES being told things they don’t want to hear, even when what we are hearing is true. We might *appreciate* it. It might be *good* for us. It might be *motivated by love*. It might be *correct*. We may even, by the grace of God, be *wise* and *thank* the person for the unwelcome word. But no one, even people inclined to getting feedback, and getting better – no one LIKES being told things they don’t want to hear. And yet, hearing things we don’t want to hear is a good and healthy part of life. It’s not always comfortable, but it is our calling.

I think of Proverbs 9:

⁷Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse,
and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.

⁸Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you;
reprove a wise man, and he will love you.

⁹Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser;
teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.

¹⁰The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

The difference between being wise and foolish has nothing to do with your intelligence, your talents, your capacity and everything to do with discerning truth. When reality splashes us with cold water, do we adjust ourselves to reality or do we try to shoehorn reality to adjust to us?

Jesus seems especially driven and maybe, depending on your reading, prickly in our Gospel lesson today. His face is set toward Jerusalem – He’s a man on a mission – a mission to

die for the sin of the world. Along the way he finds resistance from Samaritans, who are bitter that He's going to "those people" in Jerusalem. He deals with disciples, who are hoping Jesus will pour out God's wrath for the inhospitality and disrespect of the Samaritans. Would-be disciples come asking to follow Him but have priorities that aren't in keeping with Jesus' most important mission. Jesus is doing what He came to do and sheep – those already in His flock and those other sheep, not yet of His fold, are scattering like so many herded cats. Jesus – His priorities, His mission – must come first and as person after person in Luke 9 is bombarded by things they don't want to hear, rather than adjusting themselves to reality, they're trying to adjust reality to themselves. That's textbook foolishness. Eventually, people will grow to hate the message so much that they'll try in vain to destroy the truth by killing the Messenger in Jerusalem.

All of which makes me think about pastors. Partly because I am one. Partly because I'm one of Jesus' sheep who gets into my own share of foolishness. Partly because being a pastor is an office that God created to serve the Church, where the pastors are Jesus' undershepherds – and of course, partly because this afternoon our pastor-elect Brad Wellik will be ordained into that office and installed as a pastor at Mountain View. And pastors, when they're faithful to Jesus, sometimes have to tell people things that they don't want to hear.

You see, the orders come from someone else. His name is Jesus and He is set on His priorities, His mission. Telling people what they don't want to hear happens when we teach in line with Scripture and it cuts, the truth hurts (which is different than harm), maybe you chafe against it or resent us from what we say or how you feel about it – because God's Word doesn't always leave us feeling good. Telling people what they don't want to hear happens regularly in worship – in readings, in sermons, maybe even in this sermon this very second as God's Law, His good and perfect will, what with all its' demands of perfection is preached to you and, well... no one LIKES being told things about themselves that they don't want to hear. It happens in pastoral care situations, too – on homebound visits, in counseling, in confession, and while

we're teaching Bible studies. None of which is license for the pastor to be a jerk – tact is good. Picking the right spots, choosing our battles is good. Exercising patience is good. Having compassion and offering understanding as something being *normal* even if still *sinful* is good. In some situations waiting for people to come to you is good while in others going right to a person is better... there's more of an art to it than a science. In some ways, all the parenting techniques good parents use with their kids kind of apply here. But I have to tell you, *this* undershepherd, called by Jesus to share tell you things you don't always want to hear is a sinner. Oh and by the way, so is *that* soon-to-be one.

Moreover, I'll let you in on a little secret – we don't revel telling you what you don't want to hear. Speaking for myself, I hate disappointing people. I have a tough time when people are angry at me. You've heard me say before, I'm a recovering people pleaser. I don't know Pastor Brad well enough yet to tell you if that applies to him but I know that he's a congenial person and I don't think he wants to offend or hurt anyone. But we're undershepherds of Jesus, the same Jesus in our text with His face fixed on Jerusalem – fixed on His mission to defeat sin and death while He saves the world. That means that we, by association to Jesus are called to go EVERYWHERE He goes – and please, no offense, I'd rather you be put out by me than Jesus. That means some won't like what we stand for. Others won't like who we're trying to reach out to or how we're doing it. The sinful human reaction is to call down fire from Heaven but then again Jesus rebukes that, too. Still others will want to have it both ways, a foot in allegiance to Jesus and a foot in allegiance to something else – family, job, wealth, reputation. Strap in and get ready, Brad... it's not always comfortable to say that but it is our calling.

Pastor Brad and I, unlike Jesus, are not perfect. But next time you're mad at us about something we've said or how we've said it, please take a moment to ask and consider – are you put out because what we did was sinful or because it hit you in your own sin? We're sinners, so it might be us – we're going to mess up sometimes and please, come and talk to us about that. But ask yourself – are we making you mad, or is the message we have to share at “fault?”

But you know, it's not just pastors. Really none of this is different than the Christian life generally speaking. It's not always comfortable but it is our calling! You live in this same tension – Jesus has won victory but things haven't all been made right, not quite yet. You're part of the priesthood of all believers. You're sent on God's mission to the world – sinners yourselves, giving a reason for the hope you have. You won't always do it perfectly. Some people won't like what you stand for and some people won't like who you're reaching out to and how you're doing it. Still other times people you love will want to have it both ways – to be in the world AND of the world, and want your approval and pressure you to do the same. It's not always comfortable... but it's our calling.

And best of all, remember what's driving this Type-A task oriented, you might even say prickly Jesus here today. His face is set toward Jerusalem. His face is set toward carrying the sin of the whole world, suffering for it and dying. His face is set because of His love for the inhospitable Samaritans, the vengeful disciples, the would-be disciples distracted by other, lesser priorities. His face is set toward the sins of sheep in the Church chafing against faithful messages in keeping with God's Word, the sins of the world who don't like what we stand for, the sins of Christians feeling vengeful against the world for not liking them or Jesus.

For all the challenge of being an undershepherd called to share the things Jesus teaches that you don't want to hear, we also get to preach the Good News in all its sweetness. That God loves you. That Jesus took your sins to the cross, with a single-minded locked in vision so fixed on saving you that nothing will distract Him from holding you tight to Himself. We get to baptize, as He commanded, forgive sins in His name, speak the Words He spoke when He cut a new covenant with His own blood for the forgiveness of our sins.

The same goes for Christians when we confess our resentful heart, lament our lack of love, repent our misplaced priorities – we're forgiven, freed and strengthened to hear the truth and by the Holy Spirit's help, adjust ourselves to it. It's not always comfortable... but it's our

calling as forgiven sinners who are promised eternal life and help for walking as disciples of Jesus today. In His name, Amen.