

So, as some of you may know, this next week my family and I will go on vacation. Later on in July we'll be flying to Disney World. But this upcoming vacation will be a road trip to Iowa to visit some extended relatives that we haven't seen in quite some time. Road trips can be a lot of fun. But they can also be pretty stressful. Because you never know quite what you'll find when you get on the road.

I was thinking back recently to our last family road trip. We were heading back home on I-70, somewhere in the middle of Illinois, when the traffic in front of us came to a stop. It didn't just slow down. It stopped. Completely. To the point that people were turning off their engines and getting out of their cars.

Most of you have been in traffic jams like that, I'm sure. And you know, almost immediately, that this has got to be caused by a car accident. With construction, the traffic slows down, but it usually keeps moving little by little. This wasn't construction.

Now, in circumstances like this, my wife and I tend to react in two very different ways. I start looking for alternatives. Can we get off the highway and take backroads? Maybe ride the shoulder a little bit and get to an exit? We've got four wheel drive... we could do a u-turn through the median.

My wife, on the other hand, likes to sit tight and wait it out. Just stick to the road we're on. It's the best route. It'll start moving eventually. If we go off the path, we'll just end up getting lost or turned around or it'll take more time in the long run anyway. In this case, her argument won out, and half an hour later, we were very slowly moving again.

And, to be honest, usually that is the best choice. Just stick to the road you're on. Do what the GPS says. Do what you know is right. Don't get yourself turned around just because the path becomes difficult. It's a life lesson, really. And one that I think would resonate with St Luke.

You see, Luke has often been described as writing travelogues. His Gospel and the book of Acts are both narratives of journeys. They are his retellings of the travels that different people went on. In His Gospel account, many of the important events happen on the road. As people are traveling from point A to point B. Jesus is always on the move to somewhere else.

And, of course, the book of Acts is always full of traveling. It's called the "Acts of the Apostles" but it really should be called the "Journeys of the Apostles." Because Luke focuses entirely on how the Gospel spreads from town to town, city to city, through the missionary work of apostles like Peter and Paul.

So, Luke likes to focus on travel. But that becomes especially apparent in our Gospel lesson for today. Because this passage marks the beginning of a very special journey for Jesus. It is the beginning of Jesus' journey to the cross.

Jesus has been traveling all over the place up until now. Through Judea and Samaria and Galilee and even into Gentile lands around Galilee. But now he has one destination. And we see that destination spelled out for us twice in the text: "*When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.*" And then again a little later: "*But the people did not receive Jesus, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.*"

"He set his face to Jerusalem." It's an odd expression. One we wouldn't readily use in English. But I think you get the meaning of it. Everything that Jesus says and does from this point forward is taking him to Jerusalem. It's taking him to Palm Sunday and the Last Supper and the Garden of Gethsemane and the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.

He has set his face to Jerusalem. That is his one path. His one journey. His one goal. He has locked in that destination on his GPS and he will not move away from it. Not for an accident on the road or construction slowing him down. Not to check out that little antique mall he saw a few miles back or that family restaurant that looks so good. No, he is going to Jerusalem. And no one can slow him down.

But there are many who don't understand this fact. The Samaritans don't. They want him to stick around. Teach them. Do some miracles. Just like before. But he refuses. He has set his face to Jerusalem.

The disciples don't understand it either. They think he refuses to stay with the Samaritans because... they're Samaritans. Nobody likes Samaritans. So they want him to stop and rain fire from the heavens upon them. But he refuses. He has set his face to Jerusalem.

And finally we get these three people here. These three nameless followers. Who each have pretty reasonable requests of Jesus. But none of them can meet Jesus' standards.

One of them says, *"I will follow you wherever you go."* But Jesus intentionally tries to scare him off. *"Foxes have holes, and birds in the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."* In other words, you can come along, but don't expect luxuries like, you know, sleeping in a bed. Jesus doesn't have time for hotel rooms. He has set his face to Jerusalem.

Another says, *"Lord, let me first go and bury my father."* Surely, Jesus will slow down long enough for this man's funeral... Nope. *"Leave the dead to bury their own dead."* Jesus doesn't have time for funerals. He has set his face to Jerusalem.

Still another says, *"Let me first say farewell to those at my home."* It'll take five minutes, Jesus. Five minutes... Uh uh. *"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."* Jesus doesn't have time for goodbyes. He has set his face to Jerusalem.

For Jesus, that's what it means to stay on the path. That's what it means to set your face toward a goal. That's what it means to follow him. Necessities and luxuries. Joy and grief. Family and friends. All of it is sacrificed when you follow Jesus.

How many of you have made that sacrifice? How many of you have been that devoted? How many of you have followed Jesus in that way?

I sure haven't. And I don't think you have either. If you slept in a bed last night. If you mourned the loss of a loved one. If you left the house to do anything other than doing all you can for the kingdom of God, then you have done less than God demands.

And you have done less than Jesus did for you. Because Jesus really did give up everything. He really did set his face to Jerusalem. And he let nothing turn him aside.

Not bare necessities or simple luxuries. Not joy or grief. Not family or friends. Jesus waited until he was actually hanging nailed to a cross before he even made arrangements for his own mother to be taken care of by John. Jesus was single minded in his determination to save you. He let nothing take him off that path.

The truth of the matter is that we will always be distracted from our goal of following Jesus. I read a funny little piece the other day. It was talking about how a family was determined to go to church as often as they possibly could, as long as their children's involvement in sports didn't prevent them from going. And that this ridiculously high priority that they had given the church resulted in them attending a whole 4 times in the last year.

But that's how life is. I'm not saying it's good or right. Just that it's inevitable. You don't have to look hard to find something more important than following Jesus. In fact, most of the time, it will find you.

But thanks be to God, Jesus found nothing more important than saving you. He set his face to Jerusalem. He set his face to pain and suffering the likes of which we will never know. He set his face to your salvation. And he stayed on that path all the way to the cross.

And then all the way to the empty tomb. So that you might know without a doubt that even when you have wandered in this path called life. Even when you have tried to find your own way. Even when you have been frustrated by the journey or given in to temptation. Even when you have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God...

Jesus stayed on the path for you. Jesus sacrificed himself for you. Jesus won eternal life for you. And even though you still wander, to this very day he still calls to you, "Follow me." Amen.