

Problem: Is Jesus calling us to do an impossible task by following him?

-In C.S. Lewis' famous book, *The Lion, Witch, and the Wardrobe*, a turning point comes when several characters encourage each other with reports that Aslan, the great lion and true ruler of the oppressed Narnia, has reappeared to fight the evil witch. Their words of encouragement are direct and to the point: "Aslan is on the move."

-In our Gospel story today within the Book of Luke, something similar is happening within these verses. It is a turning point for Jesus. Having preached, taught, and worked miracles, Jesus now hears the call to turn toward Jerusalem, and the rest of Luke's narrative tells of his journey there. In short, Jesus is on the move. God is on the move.

-Now, what does Luke mean by "on the move". Many of us, rightly so I think, see "on the move" as a literal journey from point A to point B on a map of some sort. I'll warn you right now, if you see tour advertised as "retracing Jesus' journey in Luke" within Israel/Palestine run away! The Book of Luke, many scholars believe was written for Christians in Rome. It is likely that Luke probably never even set foot in Israel before. Thus Jesus' geographical journey that Luke describes is laughable. On his journey, Jesus seems to teleport to Samaria in the north and then immediately all the way down south to the Dead Sea, and then back near Jerusalem followed by then being way out on the current day Syrian border. There is no logic to his physical route and clearly Luke didn't care about physical location or most likely didn't know where most things were located.

-Instead, it seems the gospel writer's concern is a theological one. "The stories Luke shares reveal the character of Jesus and, in turn, the Father who sent him and the mission Jesus has been sent to accomplish" (David Lose)

-So how do we follow this "God on the move (theologically)"? For many Christians seem stuck in trying to follow Jesus in the physical/geographical way which doesn't make sense: being wandering nomads always able to forgive with blameless/perfect lives like the physical Jesus himself. To follow Jesus is to be the hero like Jesus. This way, similar to one trying to follow Jesus' actual geographical journey as laid out in Luke, is frustratingly almost impossible and I would argue, not the point.

-Following a "God on the move" requires a shift in mind, body, and spirit that has rarely been emphasized in our culture or the historical church.

Solution: Following Jesus is not really about the perfect "road of discipleship" or "how heroic we can be" in facing persecution. Instead, it is about focusing on what matters most.

-I love to play soccer, but I haven't played consistently since high school. Abby and I signed up to play on a Co-ed Missoula Parks and Rec team that plays every Monday. Abby's critique of my getting distracted by the ball switching fields. I follow the ball and am not focused on the team's purpose.

-For the writer of Luke, I believe, is giving the same critique. The heart of this passage may not be the road of discipleship nor replicating Jesus' heroic courage in facing the cross. Rather, it is a single mindedness (focus) of purpose that is prompted by God's profound love for humanity and all the world.

-To be a disciple, then, is to be focused on God's love, not a hero of it.

-To be honest, this is much more of an accurate description of prophets and characters in the Bible. Few of them, in my book, are heroes like Charlton Heston. Most of them are the unusual or flawed people who were far from wanting to be heroes. Jesus' disciples were a ragtag group of 12 country boys who fished out of the no-name village of Capernaum, Mary was a poor young girl who wasn't allowed into any house even to give birth to a child, Moses had a speech impediment which at least didn't stop him from having the longest arguments with God in the entire Bible, Elijah (the "great prophet") gets so fed up with how God doesn't seem to be working the way he wants runs away and pouts in cave and refuses to come out.

-Next week is the first Sunday in July and the first Sunday of my new sermon series on the Book of Jonah. This is a fascinating, short book of the Bible that few have read through entirely. You want to talk about being flawed? Jonah takes the cake. Here is a prophet who runs away in the complete opposite direction from where God calls him to go, doesn't even want to step foot in the city even after he gets famously re-directed by a fish and then complains about God "saving the enemy" that "he might as well die."

-Yet it is these flawed people who somehow get focused on God's moving and profound love for all the world and with God's help make a difference.

Implication: "God on the move" can compel our church to dig deeper, "keep our face to Jerusalem", and keep focused on what matters in our community.

-The same is true for us. God is on the move here too! It doesn't require us to be the perfect heroes or get distracted by other things that come our way, but to focus on the team. To keep our faces turned toward Jerusalem.

-What if our church linked everything we do to "God on the move"? Yes, our church needs a paint job. Why? It is true that if we don't paint it soon, some of the exterior wood will continue to rot. But, if we stop there, we can become distracted. What if, instead, this requires a shift and a keeping of focus? Why does our church need to be repainted? Because if "God is on the move" in everything we do, God is on the move within the ministry of our building. Our building ministers to our community. God moves through our building in changing people's lives. So painting our building, most importantly, means us saying to our community, you are welcome here and we care. We see God moving in this space that is clean, bright, and safe. Many spaces for people in Bonner, Milltown, Clinton, and Turrah are not this way. This is what it means, I think to keep focused.

-This is what our Community Mapping Initiative which you all will be invited to take part in this summer is all about. It's about keeping focused on a "God on the move"

- I have heard many of you as well as others who are not part of our church comment to me saying "wow, what a nice little church!" This is great, but is this really keeping our heads turned toward Jerusalem?

-What if we focused on labeling ourselves not as the "little nice church" but as the "God on the move" church?

-If it's possible for someone like Jonah of all people to find a focus on God's "moving" love, than I am confident it can be for us too. God's on the move! Let's not be afraid to miss it. Amen.