

Sermon – Luke 9:51-62; Galatians 5:1, 13-25

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Grace Lutheran Church

3 Pentecost – Year C

26 June 2022

“Fruitful Freedom”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. It is a well-established fact that navigation is not my strong suit. I’ve lived in Oak Park for seven years and I’ll still open up my maps app to help me get around the village. The degree of difficulty only increases when I’m in an unfamiliar place. And in a foreign country? It’s bad enough when I understand the language. Figuring out where I’m going in a different language? Forget about it. I recall becoming almost paralyzed in a navigational meltdown the first time I tried to find my way through the streets of Vienna. Why had the Austrians made things so much more difficult than they needed to be, I wondered? What would possess them to give so many streets the same name? And why wasn’t that the name of the streets on my map? What kind of a street name was “einbahnstrasse,” anyway? For those of you keeping score at home, no, my German is no better than my French. It did eventually dawn on me that einbahnstrasse – as many of you already know – is not a street’s name but it’s type. Einbahnstrasse, German for one-way street. Let’s just say it’s a good thing I was exploring on foot and not behind the wheel of a car. But once I knew the meaning, the way was easy enough to follow.
2. Today we encounter Jesus on the road, with others struggling to read the signs. Jesus, Luke tells us, has his face set toward Jerusalem. Jerusalem itself is the problem for the first group who misunderstands him, these Samaritans

- whose religious road led instead to Mount Gerizim. James and John, the aptly named sons of thunder, are no better at understanding Jesus' direction. They think that a rejection of Jesus is a reason to bring down the wrath of God upon the Samaritans. But vengeance is not part of Jesus' path. Others think they know where Jesus is going and wish to join him on the way, but Jesus rebukes them. They do not yet understand what it means for him to go to Jerusalem. This is no easy journey; there will be no cushy hotels along the way, not even foxholes or bird nests. Neither is there any time to waste, not even to say farewell to family, living or dead. The time to follow Jesus is now and his course is set. Jesus is going to Jerusalem, and he's going there to die.
3. This is not a journey any of us would choose for ourselves. As Mark Bangert points out, "there are dangers involved. There will always be a Samaria to pass through. We have not yet reached Jerusalem; we are still 'on the way.' That's the tension in this text; that's the tension" Bangert concludes, "of the 'already, not yet.'" It is only in being joined to the death and resurrection of Christ that we are able to make the journey with Jesus. Joined to Jesus in the waters of baptism, we are always already where we need to be. We will never be lost again. But we are simultaneously not there yet, journeying along paths as yet untrodden, seeking a way forward together. At times it can feel like we are adrift, with nary a place to safely rest.
 4. The decision of the Supreme Court on Friday to overturn *Roe v. Wade* has left many feeling suddenly unsafe along the road. The matter of abortion is not simply divisive; it is morally and ethically complex. I appreciated the statement from the editors of *The Christian Century*: "The *Century* editors see eye to eye on many subjects. The ethics of abortion is not one of them. Some of us see abortion as a moral good; others very much do not. Some of us find it morally troubling but maintain that there are instances in which it is the least bad option. We agree, however," the editors continue, "about *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 decision the US Supreme Court overturned today. It was a

crucial legal protection that empowered people to make such ethical determinations for themselves – and to act on them without fear of legal sanction. Now that protection is gone.” I certainly have prayerfully held beliefs about abortion; about when it may be the right decision and when it may not be. But as I am unlikely to ever become pregnant, my voice about the choice is not the most important. It is lamentable that the court saw fit to restrict the freedom of so many, to empower states to make choices for people that should belong to women and to their healthcare providers. If you’re feeling a little more lost, a little less safe and valued today, know that I, as your pastor, stand with you. Much more importantly, the love of Christ is with you, for he is the One who leaves safety behind to stand with the marginalized, with those whose voices the world seeks to silence.

5. In the midst of this, as always in the midst of everything, Jesus calls us to follow him today. He makes no bones about what the journey will entail. The end of his road is, well, the end of the road. He will go to Jerusalem and to Calvary’s cross. By the grace of God, in his death we find life. And with life, freedom. In a world that seeks in so many ways to bind us, Jesus sets us free. We are freed from this world and free of our old lives. This is at the heart of Jesus’ difficult words in today’s passage. We can either cling to the old ways or we can follow Jesus through the waters of baptism and into newness of life. We can’t do both. Today, Jesus calls us again to leave our old lives behind. In doing so, we discover the beautiful freedom of the gospel and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Freedom in Christ is fruitful. Love, joy peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – there is no law against these things! We embrace and enact these freedoms in anticipation of the coming reign of God in which we shall all truly be free. From sin and death and all that would bind us. We are not there yet, but Jesus has guaranteed we’ll get there. Along the way, let us love one another.

6. Today, we rejoice with Chloe Ann as she is baptized into Christ and joins him on the journey. Today, we welcome Chloe as a sister in Christ. In that welcome, we are reminded of the call laid upon our lives in baptism. As David Lose points out, “those who would embrace Jesus and his mission must be under no illusion of what it will mean for them.” There is, Lose notes, a “truth-in-advertising element” to Jesus’ words today. Jesus wants us to know the direction of the road, a path taken to “eschew violence, to embrace suffering for the sake of another, to refuse comfort, privilege, [and] status for the sake of fidelity to God’s vision and mission.” In the counter-cultural gospel of our Lord, we find true freedom and its fruits. Against such things there is no law. Today, let us commit ourselves to love our neighbors as ourselves. Let us claim joy and work for peace. Let us be kind and generous, patient and gentle. Let us show self-control and live faithfully. Let the fruit we bear be signs, that others might come to know Christ. Gifted by the Holy Spirit, let us freely follow Jesus, for he is the one way home. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.