

He set his face to go to Jerusalem. This short sentence speaks volumes about the resolve of Jesus' obedience to fulfil God's will, despite everything that would be cast before him to oppose it happening.

This in itself is a lesson for all of us – because when we make a commitment to obey a calling - Gods calling on our life – the strength of our resolve to carry it through helps us to do just that. It helps us to keep on track.

He set his face to go to Jerusalem – And so he goes on his way to Jerusalem -the place - the city that symbolises the link between the old and the new. The place where Jesus is to complete his exodus to God.

He will be taken up there – and these words take us back to the story about Elijah's ascension to God. Jesus will indeed be taken up there - and something new will emerge from Jerusalem – from there will emerge the new Christian mission that will go out to the ends of the earth.

On his journey to Jerusalem, Jesus teaches his disciples, about the meaning of his way. He engages with them at every turn, teaching them about being his disciple. He delivers challenging parables so that they can better understand, like those parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal son.

Through his own experience of rejection on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus shows them that in their life's journey as his disciples they will not be free from trials and he teaches them how to deal with whatever will come their way.

When he is rejected by the Samaritans, James and John want to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them. The wording of this verse, echoes that of 2 Kings' chapter 1, when Elijah twice called down fire to destroy his enemies.

But Jesus teaches a different way to handle rejection. Firstly he rebukes the disciples for even suggesting that they commit such violence. His way is about non-retaliation against enemies.

He leads them around the Samaritan village and on to another village.

I wonder how we, deal with rejection? Where is our focus? On some sort of retaliation or are our eyes on him who shows us the way to life with God.

Another feature of our gospel reading this morning is the teaching style of Jesus – the way in which he drives his message home.

Along the journey to Jerusalem, he illustrates the urgency of his message that leads to the way of life in God by using three hyperbolic proverbs. Now as we know the function of normal proverbs is to help people make sense out of daily life experience, e.g. a *stitch in time saves nine* and another one not so popular these days, *spare the rod and spoil the child*.

But Jesus doesn't use normal proverbs, he uses hyperbole or exaggeration to **jolt** his listeners out of their staid ways and to view existence from an entirely new angle- that of discipleship in response to the kingdom of God.

In the first proverb *foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests but I have nowhere to lay my head* the exaggeration highlights the humble lowliness of Jesus – below even the birds and the foxes; in the second *Let the dead bury the dead* –he highlights how we are not to go back to death in any form. We are to let go of old memories that are small and suffocating; to let go of old hurts and affronts that are revisited too often to allow healing. We are to let go of old fears and hates and angers that block the breathe of life.

Do not go back to death – let new life in and bring it to others. Proclaim the kingdom.

And the third - No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

Ancient ploughs needed dexterity and concentration to make the new furrows straight - they very easily became crooked when the person lost focus on manoeuvrability and steering methods.

This is a call is to keep your eyes on him – not losing sight of the one who will keep us from falling and when we do stumble or fall (as we invariably do), he will be there to help us up.

In today's epistle Paul reminds us that we are called into freedom through the divine love in our lives and this freedom, through our own self giving love, means that we are able to live a life that goes beyond self-indulgence – a life that has an outward - beyond self - vision.

What this means for us today, I believe, is that where ever we are on our journey, and the language in the gospel speaks about discipleship as a journey, we can be assured that along the way we will be confronted with all sorts of trials - however the important thing is **to keep on the journey.**

To keep open to learning, sometimes through our joys in God, and sometimes through the mistakes we make. Remembering that just as Elijah had the very faithful Elisha by his side vowing never to leave him, we are continually and always enfolded in the love, wisdom and guidance of the Holiness of the Trinity.

We are not on the journey alone. God's provision is constantly with us. Sometimes through unexpected events or through people around us.

As we learn more about discipleship in our daily life experience, we need not be afraid to witness to our faith, exercising those fruits that are love, joy, peace, patience with others and ourselves, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentle ness and self- control.

If we live by the Spirit let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Let us all, therefore, set our face to Jerusalem – the New Jerusalem – with the steadfast resolve of Jesus in the power of the love of God.

God's blessings be upon you all.

The Lord be with you.