**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

**“He Set His Face”**

Pastor Aaron Reseburg

June 29, 2025

*Luke 9:51-62*

In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus is beginning a journey to Jerusalem. He has been to Jerusalem many, many times before for different religious festivals throughout His life. This time is different, though. He is going to celebrate the Passover, but it will be His last Passover to celebrate. He is going to Jerusalem in order to die. He will bear the wrath of God on a cross for all people.

In our reading, John doesn’t understand this yet. He does seem to understand who Jesus is; after all, earlier in the chapter, John saw Jesus in all His glory at the transfiguration. So, when the Samaritans shun Jesus, John is outraged and wants to call down fire on them. John wanted to be like the prophets of old who called down fire on false prophets. John didn’t understand why Jesus was going to Jerusalem yet.

It's hard to blame John. How many times have we all been angry with the blasphemy going on around us? I remember the outrage that happened during the Olympics with the parody of the Lord’s Supper. It is still pride month; just look at how they use the rainbow, they wave God’s weapon of mass destruction in His face along with their own sin. Murderers, thieves, adulterers, sinners in general, they all seem to prosper, and our culture glorifies them!

John doesn’t understand. He thinks that Jesus has come to conquer by force. Jesus has not come to conquer by force; He has come to conquer with love. It is love that brought Jesus to the earth and it is love that will hold Jesus to the cross. Jesus has come this time with a message of love.

John was right, those people deserved to have fire come down on them for their sin. The problem is, of course, that if God was burning people for their sin, John would have been consumed as well. That’s our problem, too. Other people’s sin makes us so angry that we want to call down fire, and in our anger, we forget our own sin. While trying to take the speck out of our neighbor’s eye, we miss the log in our own.

It is easy to judge, it’s easy to condemn, it’s easy to explain to someone that what they are doing is wrong. It’s easy to ignore them, to focus on the people who have it all together, it’s easy to love people who are easy to love. It is hard to love people who are hard to love, people whose lives are messy, people who are covered in sin and its effects. It’s easy to talk about how bad someone is and hard to love them while they are bad.

When you are doing difficult things, focus is important. Most of us aren’t good at focus. When you are doing something difficult you must be focused, you have to block out the world, block out all the distractions and focus your mind on that one thing.

That is the kind of focus that Jesus has in our reading; He is focused on loving a people who are hard to love. He is focused on the cross and on your salvation.

We are called to be focused as well, to be focused on Christ and His mission, ignoring all the other things that might get in the way. That’s a hard thing to do. There are so many things calling to us, so many things pulling at us from different directions. Work, school, your children, friends, your own happiness, your house, your doctors, your neighbors, your hobbies, your wants, clubs you are in, organizations you are a part of. There are so many things calling for your attention that it’s easy to lose sight of Christ.

It's easy to lose focus and become distracted.

Christ, however, never lost His focus on you. His love and care for you drove Him to the cross and helped Him to endure all the pain and suffering that came along with it. His love for you continues to this day. He died on the cross to take away your sins, but His work on you is not done. Through the Holy Spirit, He continues to work on you; He continues to sanctify you, to make you holy.

At this very moment, Christ, who is our Great High priest, is praying for you in heaven. He is guiding you and watching over you. Today, He comes to you in wine and bread. Today, He comes to nourish you for the journey of this Christian life. In bread and wine and through His Word, Christ gives you what you need to stay focused on Him in this life.

The Christian life is a difficult one. Staying faithful and focused on Christ is hard work; it means denying yourself and some of the pleasures of this world. It means casting aside all the things that would seek to separate you from Him. Christ says that anyone who looks back instead of focusing on Him is not fit for the Kingdom of God. So don’t look back; keep your eyes fixed on Christ and what He has done for you.

He has done it all for you, and He will sustain you through this life and into the next one unless you reject Him. There is no accepting Him on your own terms or when it’s convenient for you. He requires all of you because He has given all of Himself for you and to you. He gave His life for yours and He continues to give you His life. Through the waters of Holy Baptism, you have been given the gift of eternal life. So set your face to Christ, focus on Him and Him alone because He loves you and cares for you and is focused on you.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.