

## **Sermon, Reverend Dr. Barbara T. Duncan**

**July 1, 2007**

### **Fifth Sunday After Pentecost**

Do you remember playing “Hide & Seek” when you were a child? You would close your eyes and count to a hundred if you were “it” while all the other kids would run and hide. And then when you reached a hundred, you would yell, “Ready or not, here I come!”

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem whether they were ready or not. For thousands of years, the Jewish people had been counting the passing days thinking they were ready for his coming, and then when he came, they ran to hide and never really came out to welcome him.

We are told in Luke 9 that Jesus set His face toward Jerusalem and to get there he and his disciples take the direct route through Samaria. Ready or not, Jesus was on his way. When he arrives in the villages, the people there do not welcome him. Why? Because he is a Jew and he is headed to the city of Jerusalem for Passover. I’m sure the Disciples thought better of going the way Jesus chose. They would rather have taken the longer path around Samaria because of the centuries’ old conflict between the Jews and Samaritans. It was a common practice to hinder any band of pilgrims who used their villages as a shortcut. It is therefore no surprise, when they are rejected by the townsfolk that James and John, the Sons of Thunder, ask if they can call fire down from heaven to destroy them. In conflicts there is nothing sweeter than the total annihilation of the enemy and when God can be included in the destruction, all the better.

But focusing on the mission at hand was what Jesus was about. He knew what he had to do and he wasn’t about to be distracted by the Samaritans or anyone else. It was probably like

watching a toddler who is bent on getting at something and it is usually something that the child shouldn't have. They go after it tenaciously and raise quite a howl when you try to distract them.

With the celebration of our country's independence this week, where would we be were it not for the tenaciousness, the focus and determination to win our independence from England? This was no small feat. It was courage that won the victory.

Ready or not - the British came and were ready for a fight.

Ready or not - wars in different parts of the world are in need of people of peace to stand up and say "Enough!"

Ready or not - our children are still looking to us for a moral compass and for us to provide a modicum of safety for them to thrive.

Ready or not - hunger, poverty, disease continue to be an "in your face human condition."

Were the church community and individual Christians as focused on the work Christ has given us to do, even more can be done to turn the world around as we seek to make disciples for Christ.

Perhaps the image of putting one's hand to the plow and not looking back (or driving forward in a car while not looking out the back window) refers to looking back both at all the very good things in our lives (and in a congregation's life), like family and friends, comforts and satisfactions, "successful" programs; but also all the sins in our lives, which have been forgiven by Christ. Like Paul, we can neither wallow in our past sins nor boast of our past successes if we are to be fit for the kingdom of God.

Very few people are expert in anything all by themselves. They need a supporting community. Do you know a good musician who was not trained, nurtured and sustained by the music community? Show me an athlete who achieves excellence all alone, apart from the athletic community. Very few wise men become so without the accumulated wisdom of the centuries as expressed by colleges and universities and libraries. Medical people are more like ensembles and symphonies than soloists. What business tycoon does it all on his own without dedicated experts in finance, engineering, personnel, and marketing? Excellence requires participation in, and support of, a community of like-minded people.

So it is with the church -- a forerunner of the new kingdom. Very few achieve Christian maturity all by themselves. Seldom is the Bible studied diligently without the aid of scholars and teachers. Rarely are people led to generosity by their own impulses. Neither can the church be an influence without the total commitment of its membership in sharing the work.

Read again the words of our text and be impressed that the lifetime commitment is exactly what is called for. A lifetime of service. Call it anything you please, but do not call it less than it is -- total commitment.

As the auto insurance company advertises, "Life comes at you fast." It is up to each of us to be prepared spiritually to commit ourselves to the life that is presented us, ready or not - a life of true commitment to discipleship as a follower of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ.