

Sunday, June 27, 2010 – The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 9: 51-62

The World Upside Down

Jesus' message was straight forward and to the point. Its impact would change history. First of all, Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of God is here and now. There is nothing so radical about that statement once we get beyond the whole sense of kingdom. We find it in the first chapter of Genesis and confess it each Sunday in the first articles of the Creeds. God is the creator of the heavens and the earth, of all that is seen and unseen. Do we really believe it? If so, do we live it? Jesus is challenging our thinking today just as much as the established patterns of society in his day.

If God is the creator, God is the creator of the whole of the universe throughout the billions years of its existence and the billions of light years of its expanse. The laws of physics that are as true on the earth as they are at the edge of our rapid expanding universe. There is only one creator of the whole of the universe. God is present and active throughout universe. To use the words Luther's used in explaining Christ's presence in the Sacrament, God is present "in, with and under" all that exists and beyond all that we can know.

Over time we have seen some developed some strange ideas in an attempt to whittle God down to our size. The idea that God is locked in a great cosmic battle between the forces of Good and evil first occurred during the period of Persian dominance and is borrowed from Persian thought. We are radical monotheists. There is one God. God is not in contention with any cosmic powers, forces or beings. During the period of Greek domination the idea developed that because the earth was imperfect, God could not be present on the earth. There is no such thing as perfect in all of the universe. There is no word for perfect in the Hebrew language. The universe is dynamic, constantly changing and growing. God is actively present everywhere bring creation into being. Because the universe is God's creation, it runs according to God's rules. You do not throw a glass pitcher into the air and not expect it to fall to the earth and shatter. We do not treat the earth, its creatures and its people with abuse and contempt and think that we will not experience the consequences.

The world is not an easy place to live. Our earth is in constant motion. We are challenged to learn, think and grow. We must learn to live within our environment. We develop both our brains and our ability to work together as we strive to overcome adversity. The universe is not designed from our perspective. We are not created to sit on our leisure with all of our needs being met. This is God's creation and we are here to participate in the ongoing work of creation.

Jesus made it quite clear that God is present throughout all of the creation. God has not turned control of the earth over to Satan, humans, the Romans or anyone else.

The second part of Jesus' message was that God cares deeply about the whole of creation and all that is in it. Because the kingdom of God is here and now, we need to "repent, and believe in the good news." Mark 1:15. The good news is Gospel. The good news is that we are each one loved, valued and accepted by God not on the basis of anything that we do or believe but only because of God's love for us. God created us and gave us life. It is the love of a mother for a child to whom she gave birth; the love of a father for a child for whom he cares. God cares deeply about the whole of the universe and all that is a part of it. The Hebrew word most likely used by Jesus which we translate from the Greek as "repent" does not mean to be sorry for what we have done. This is the contemporary understanding of the word. The meaning for Jesus' listeners was much more radical. It meant to "turn around, totally change direction." To faith, or better yet trust, in the good news of Jesus would lead to a total transformation of a person's life. You could never go home again. Here we begin to get to the heart of today's Gospel.

Humanity is so very good at down-sizing God. We want to limit what God can do or where God can be in order to place God in our sphere of understanding. Then we strive to limit who God is willing to accept and love. If we are able to limit God's compassion and care, then we are able to limit the people, creatures and things that we need to care about. If God does not love them, then we don't have to either. The religious authorities of Israel had done their very best to transform the Torah, revelation or teachings of God, into law, requirements we must meet in order to be acceptable to God. The problem with this kind of legalism is that God's love and acceptance is never dependent on our action. God is always the initial actor. We can only respond. God spoke and the universe began its ascent into being. The universe did nothing to be created. God called Abraham and Abraham responded in faith. Abraham did nothing to be called. God brought the people of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt and the people were to responded in obedience.

It is not always easy to live in obedience to God's teaching, but that is the way of living life to its fullest. Let's take a closer look at Torah. Today we summarize it as the Ten Commandments. It is unfortunate that we almost always skip the second verse of Exodus, chapter twenty which is the most important. "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Exodus 20:2. The Exodus is the saving act for Israel. God chose the people and saved them. The people had nothing to offer. They were slaves. Their freedom was their good news. They were called out of their bondage into a living relationship with God. Everywhere they went, God went with them. At Sinai God gave the people the Torah, the revelation or teaching of God. The Torah is the way the people must live in order to experience the fullness of their salvation. The Torah is the way the people must live in relationship to God and one another that they might live long in the land the Lord God would give to them. The Torah is never seen as a burden. It is always a joy because it enriches our

relationship with God and one another. It is the presence and activity of God in our lives that transforms our reality so that we can begin to see, live and act in a new way. God's revelation of how we are to live in compassion and care for one another and all of God's creation is just as real today as it ever has been. As our universe expands, so do our responsibilities.

The good news of Jesus is that we are loved and valued by God, not on the basis of anything that we do, but only on the basis of God's love for us. We open our hearts and our lives to God's transforming presence. Once we open ourselves to God we will never again be the same. It is not a matter of doing the right things or believing the correct doctrine. The way, or the revelation and teachings of God, is not a set of requirements that we must meet in order to be accepted by God. They are our response to what God has done for us. They protect us from the consequences of our otherwise destructive behavior.

In a self centered, get all you can world Jesus proclamation sounded like sheer nonsense. Jesus did not care. This is God's world and Jesus was about to turn things upside down. Amen.

Dennis Hartsook, Pastor
Trinity Lutheran Church