

1) *Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem*, Luke says,

and in so doing, he instantly becomes *persona non grata* in a Samaritan village.

So what do you think that “set” face looks like?

- If you were a portrait artist—how would you paint it?
- If you were a movie producer—how would you coach the actor playing Jesus?

Clearly, this face of Jesus is a highly focused face—but what *kind* of focus does it have?

Focused faces come in many forms.

- Is the face of Jesus an *impervious, inscrutable, impenetrable* face—
a face no one can read—focused on his destination, but set on auto-pilot?
- Is his face a *resigned, even fatalistic* face:
This won't end well but I've got to play it out to the bitter end
- Does his face have a *fixated* focus—
I know what I want, where and how to get it, and I'll stop at nothing till I have it in hand.
- Is the face of Jesus the kind of face that is always “*in your face*”—
Take no prisoners—cut no deals. *If you're not a true believer, you're the enemy*
(The sort face one sees, now and then, on passionate advocates of Tea Party politics.)

If the focus of his face is none of the above, then how *does* the face of Jesus look—
set toward Jerusalem, as it is?

Is this set face a *hard* face, or is there any gentleness in it?

2) If his face is in sync with the sound of his voice, “gentle” isn’t the word that comes to mind!

- *Jesus, shall we incinerate those rude Samaritans?—*
Don't even think about it.
- *I'll follow YOU ANYWHERE, Jesus!—*
Be careful what you promise; I'm homeless, you know.
- *Can I bury my dad before I join?—*
Leave the funeral arrangements to the corpses in the ground
- *Can I at least go back and say goodbye?—*
One backward glance, and you're disqualified.

Sound gentle to you? Not so much to me.

This for sure—from what Luke tells us,

no Jesus portrait that we paint; no Jesus character in a movie we produce
can possibly be a Jesus who blandly smiles, and says “whatever.”

3) And yet . . . Luke’s picture of Jesus is more complex, the character more complicated.

Between now and the time he arrives in Jerusalem, Jesus will say several more stern things.

But he’ll also tell some stories—

- about a compassionate Samaritan who cares for a victim of vicious street crime
- about a compassionate shepherd who goes after a lost sheep
- about a compassionate father who tries to reach two sons that are seriously lost

Jesus will tell a tightly wired Martha to *just chill*,

and gently encourage a lazy-seeming Mary to listen to her heart’s content.

He will invite himself over for lunch with a rich political crook, named Zacchaeus.

Do you hear what I hear; do you see what I see?

This is extraordinary!

In his story-telling, and in his actions, all the way his death in Jerusalem, the face of Jesus, again and again, focuses in on those who, themselves, need lots of help in finding clear, centering focus for *their* own life journeys.

- He sends out the twelve to proclaim God's Good News:
If they don't welcome you, just shake off the dust, move on: Don't get distracted
- Five thousand hungry people—wo loaves and five small fish—*Whatever will we do???*
Don't get distracted—Let's see what we can do with the resources we have.

- 4) I've been thinking this week how I'd answer my own question—
What features would I paint in the face of Jesus (if I knew how to hold a brush)?
What persona would I ask the actor playing Jesus to embody
in the play I'd produce from Luke's drama script?

Two familiar faces come to mind: the serene, gentle face of Nelson Mandella.
and the irrepressibly, even impishly cheerful face of Desmond Tutu.

- Two faces set on a journey toward justice with compassion.
- Two faces, that, in my journey to follow Jesus, I'd like to approximate more closely.

The one problem with those faces, however, is precisely their prominence.
They seem larger than life. Are there faces more ordinary, closer to home?

- 5) Each week at the midweek noonday Eucharist, and each month at vestry meeting,
everyone listens to the Scripture lessons for the coming Sunday,
and shares what they hear with the preacher-to-be,
trying to help Susan, Robin, or me to get it right.

Last Wednesday, both at the noonday Eucharist, and at the evening vestry meeting,
we all talked about our imaginal impressions of the set face of Jesus.

Some of what you've heard this morning, in fact, is thanks to those two discussions.
One suggestion, from our Treasurer, Gary Hacker, has stuck with me all week.

With his permission, I pass it along:

"I see the face of Jesus," said Gary, "as a kindergarten teacher
with a bunch of children on a field trip."

They look off (and are prone to wander off) in all sorts of directions.

They are constantly distracted—sometimes to their own danger.

The teacher must maintain his or her own focus

- to get the children to their intended destination
- to nurture the children in their fledgling efforts to find their own focus, and
- to keep the kindergarten community *together*—in the *many* ways that word applies

- 6) And so, thanks to Gary, I envision Jesus, gently, relentlessly herding his distracted disciples
on down the road in the direction of Jerusalem.

- *How dare they not receive us, let's turn them into toast!*
Don't get side-tracked, guys, we're headed for Jerusalem.
- *I'd love the thrill of adventure—can I bring along all the comforts of home?*
You can't have it both ways; you'll have to make a choice.
- *You're my top priority, Jesus, REALLY; but I've got unfinished business first.*
If what is most IMMEDIATE always trumps what is most IMPORTANT—
then what you end up DOING first IS your first priority

- 7) The fact is that none of Jesus' disciples, then or now, are "fit for the kingdom of God."
Choices must be made, and choices have consequences,
BUT the journey to Jerusalem is a "growing up" journey.
Our practices of faith are daily fitness training for the kingdom of God.
Sunday, after Sunday, we come together to have our faces re-set.
Thank God we have, in Jesus, a kind and patient teacher—serene and impish—
a guide upon the way: Follow me—don't get distracted. Don't get distracted—follow me.