

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 imaginational 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

This image of Jesus has him herding cats, doesn't it? Or perhaps, herding sheep.

- 6) Engaging though that picture is, there is another element we need to name: the wolves:

all those forces with faces set—hell bent—on *corrupting & destroying the creatures of God* and—less overtly, but more seductively—

on stirring up *sinful desires that draw us all from the love of God.*

The "field trip" on which Jesus leads his disciples, then and now—in other words—

is no mere frolic through a pristine meadow; it's a struggle for survival in the heart of DC.

And so, in our attempts this morning to get a fix on the set face of Jesus,
we are given fresh insight by the compassionate vocational commitments
of Annie and Chris, mom and dad of Marleigh Anne, whom we baptize today.
Both Annie and Chris care for at-desperate-risk children *in* the heart of DC.

- Annie (as it happens) *as* a kindergarten teacher at the Bishop Walker School.
- Chris, as a crisis intervention social worker with Child Protective Services.

They can tell you, far better than I, how overwhelmingly hopeless seem the circumstances
that ensnare the children they love.

In the middle of a world riddled with demonic distractions, however, they remain focused.
In the faces of Annie and Chris, I discern the face of One that is set toward Jerusalem.

- 7) So what do we now do with Marleigh Anne, in the liturgy of baptism,
a rite elaborate in language, but simple in gesture?

Here is what we are NOT doing:

- We are not simply going through the ceremonial ritual of a social passage:
Your baby is so precious, and we're so glad you have her.
(Though both of those sentiments are firmly grounded in incontrovertible fact.)
- We are not waving a magic wand—*Presto, Chango, Marleigh is a Christian*
(Though we do believe, that, for her, this is a significant spiritual turning point.)
- We are not subjecting her parents or godparents to a theological litmus test—
A Tea Party test of loyalty and orthodoxy—
*By this baptism, you better mean what we want you to mean;
or we'll have nothing to do with you—and God won't either—and you'll be sorry.*

No, No, No—None of the above!

Here is what we ARE doing:

- We, as a community of faith, are pledging to care for Marleigh Anne,
and to support Annie and Chris, as best we can—
with the kind of commitment that they pour into the children of the inner city.
- We are trusting that, come what may, God will enfold Marleigh Anne
in the tender arms of divine love—arms big enough, and strong enough
to keep on holding her, even when she gets too big to sit on her parents' lap.
We are trusting she will be *sealed by the Holy Spirit, and marked as Christ's own, forever.*
- We are *renouncing the spiritual forces of wickedness*—
from violent crime, to obdurate ideology, to self-serving interest, to benign neglect—
forces of wickedness that bedevil the children of this city, the nation, and the world.
- We are turning toward, trusting, and promising to follow the costly grace and love
that are marks of God's power by which Marleigh today is marked.
- We are acknowledging that, in these commitments, we will get distracted—again and again.
And when we do, we will, with God's help, repent—refocus our direction.
- As we baptize Marleigh Anne, we are, with Jesus, setting our faces toward Jerusalem.