

Careful where your looking
Luke 9:51-62

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the Word of God this day. Amen.

Well some of the work has begun on the balcony. Three of the pews as some of you saw were moved downstairs to the Willow Street Entrance? It seemed like a fitting place since that part of the building is designed to be opened up to add an additional chapel on to the wing if we ever wished to. It was the vision of the original planners of St. Mark that a chapel could be added later if so desired. Now what we have with the pews isn't the same original vision that was first thought of, but it is a start, a few pews and an old pulpit from the original church set aside as a tiny chapel area.

It truly is amazing that fifty one years ago they thought ahead of what we might need as they planned for this building. They had a vision. Now we are carrying on that vision. We have taken what they have given us and continue to plan ahead. The organ, a gift that has been handed down to us, is now nearing its complete rebuild, rewiring and modernizing. For years there was a vision to accomplish this campaign. Last year we set the final parts into motion and signed the work into a deal. The money has been raised and the work is now just a few weeks away from fully being realized. The vision that begun many years ago is soon completed.

Having Visions like these are important in the life of a Church. The people of St. Matthew's had a vision to begin an English speaking church- and St. Mark's was born. The founders of St. Mark had a vision to establish their own presence in the community separate from St. Matthew's – and so St. Mark's on Carlisle Street was built. In the late 30's, even during a great depression, a vision was begun to see a new church building built further out from downtown – and side tracked by a depression and a world war, finally in the 50's St. Mark moved to this location and built this marvelous building. Throughout the history of St. Mark the people were always looking ahead. Seeking what is needed next. What is God guiding the church to become in the next 10 or 20 years. The History of St. Mark throughout its life has been a time of setting visions and achieving those visions. Of always looking ahead.

The gospel reading today even illustrates this very need to keep looking ahead. Jesus says, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." That is a striking visual picture we get. A man working a team of plowing oxen must always be alert and watching ahead, to look back is to go astray. Now in Jesus' day the plowing was a little different then today's big John Deere combines or international harvesters or even your standard garden rotor tiller.

In that region at that time they used a light metal plough that needed to be guided with one hand. This one hand was generally the left hand, and it must be adept enough to also keep the plough upright at the correct angle even as it is trying to guide it and keep the pressure at the same consistency so that the depth is at the right regular level. And that wasn't an easy task considering the rocks and stones and hills and paths in that region. And this is all with the one hand, because the other hand needs to be driving the oxen and keeping them in control. This was done by using a six foot long whipping stick with a little metal spike attach to the end for incentive. So as you can image the plowman with one hand on the plow, one hand driving the oxen, really needed to concentrate on watching where he was going. To do any good with all this work he needed to look constantly ahead between the hindquarters of the oxen and keep the furrow line in sight. If he looked around, took his eyes off of what was coming, and heaven for bid looked back while plowing, then the whole field of furrows would be crooked and twisted over on top of itself, worthless and needing reworked. So anyone looking back while plowing was worthless. Jesus says if you want to follow him, to be one of his disciples, to say you're a person of Christ, then you need to keep your eyes focused ahead, keep your eyes focused on the vision ahead.

Actually this entire text shows this by example of what Jesus was about and doing. Jesus had come into this world for one single purpose, to overcome our sinfulness, and redeem us by his sacrifice. The vision that God had for his people, Jesus was accomplishing, to reconcile them to him, washing away our sins by his body and blood. Jesus knew this was the vision and goal of his life even as he came into this world. And now was the time. Verse 51 even states, that, "When the days drew near for (Jesus) to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem."

He had been going town to town, from Galilee to Judah, to Gennesaret to Samaria. But here after Jesus comes down from the Mount of transfiguration which happens right before this text, Jesus turns and points his face towards Jerusalem and that Holy week that is coming. From that point on as he travels, while still healing with the one hand and performing miracles, and still driving people to hear the message with the other hand, he keeps his eyes always ahead knowing where it is he is going- Jerusalem, Passover, the Cross and the Grave – that resurrection moment! The vision is ahead of him, and he keeps his eyes on it.

And there is an urgency to his mission. He can't be slowed down or deterred. He never looks back or gets side tracked. He doesn't worry about people not giving him a rightful welcome – he continues on his way towards welcoming all people into God's kingdom. He doesn't worry about the comforts or physical needs like home or rest – he instead continues on

to suffer great discomfort so that all can find real comfort in God's kingdom. He doesn't worry about those who wish to bury their dead now – he is on his way to fulfill the vision of his own burial and death. He doesn't worry about waiting for people to say their farewells or good byes before they separate on their journey – he is on his way to bring all people back together with God.

Jesus is about fulfilling that one vision, following that path and bringing in the Kingdom of God. He kept his eyes on that vision and he never looked back.

So where are you looking? Where is your vision? As a church and as Christian's Christ is calling us to fulfill the same vision that he was following. To bring about the kingdom of God. Jesus began that kingdom so long ago on the cross and overcoming the grave, but we also still are called on to bring that Kingdom into this world, sharing it with others, being a piece of that kingdom here and now, being servants and stewards of the blessings we have received. So what occupies your vision, what do you keep your hands and eyes fixed to as your journey through this life?

The disciples didn't get what Jesus was talking about all the time, well most of the time. Until after the resurrection and the ascension, when the Holy Spirit came upon the church and inspired them to fulfill Christ's message. Up to that point they had been students following along. But then the vision was placed into their hands, to be the church, to care for those in need, to share the forgiveness of sins found through the love of Christ, to bring people to God. The disciples followed that vision to be the church, the body of Christ, overcoming great sufferings, temptations, pains, worries, impossibilities. But through it all keeping the vision of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God always before them.

The church is called to also fulfill this vision. To not look back and say we used to be, we were, what ever happened to, but instead look forward to the vision of the Kingdom of God. What path are we following to be that kingdom here. We have almost completed the organ campaign, which will guide us in worship in this generation and the generations to come. We voted last week to begin a Sound System campaign to this sanctuary. In this day an age people expect quality in their sound systems of places they enter and if you have to strain to hear, miss half of what is being said, then that just doesn't cut it anymore. Other ways that we can keep the vision of the kingdom of God always before us is to become active evangelists, its in our name. St. Mark Evangelical Lutheran Church. To install better church signage around the grounds, ones that people can read easily and know what we are doing. Setting up welcome teams or invitation teams to identify new members or visitors inside the church and in our own

communities. To become more knowledgeable about Scripture and the Word of God as a church together. To be better stewards of our building, and gifts and finances of this church. To maintain the gift of this building that previous generation has given us so that we can give it to the next generation. To have a worship nursery that is closer to the sanctuary so that parents don't have to worry so much about their young children that are so far away isolated from the rest of us during worship. To re-evaluate our worship opportunities and schedules of services and Sunday school time and consider what the best options are for others. To administratively reexamine how we operate as a church board and committee in this day an age, when three year commitments and monthly meetings seem to distract more then help. To reach out to others through established care teams of support for each other and others in need, to open up to even more usages of our building and grounds to outside groups or organizations. There are many avenues and goals that we can follow towards that Vision of bringing the Kingdom of God here. We just need to keep our eyes, hearts and minds looking forward centered on Christ and his kingdom. As a church we are called to accomplish this and as individuals. So where are you looking? May it be always forward at the vision of the Kingdom of God, here and now and always in Jesus' name. Amen.

May the Grace and Peace of God be with you today and throughout the week to come.