

**J.D. Ousley**  
**Sermon—30Jun19**  
**Luke 9**  
**“Getting On With It”**

*In the Name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Amen.*

When you heard me read today’s lesson from St. Luke’s Gospel, you might have thought that Christ’s words were a bit harsh.

Jesus asks a man to join his band of disciples. The man is apparently willing to join, but he asks, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

That seems like a reasonable request. We might think that Jesus would grant it.

Instead, he replies, "Let the dead bury their own dead..." According to Jesus, the disciple’s first duty is to “go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Another disciple then asks Jesus if he might say goodbye to his family before setting out on Christ’s mission. This follower gets a similar response from Jesus: "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Notice that these interchanges come just after the Gospel reports that Jesus “*set his face* to go to Jerusalem.” Although we might not ourselves use this expression to “set our faces,” we get the point.

Jesus has made up his mind to witness for God’s Kingdom against the spiritual and political powers in Jerusalem. He has set his face. His duty is clear. His path is chosen.

And having made his decision, he knows that he has to take the consequences. He is not going to look back and wish he had remained in the safety of his native Galilee.

The gravity of the situation explains what might appear to be the insensitive commands that Christ makes toward his disciples. In normal circumstances, there would be time to attend your father’s funeral before you go off to begin the work of spreading the Gospel. In normal circumstances, you would have time to run home and say goodbye to your loved ones.

But here, the situation is anything but normal. Christ is about to risk his life as he preaches his message in the Holy City. He is sufficiently familiar with the politics of the time to realize what it means to set his face to Jerusalem.

So the advice is harsh in order to fit the moment: Leave the dead to bury the dead. Don’t look back.

Now, of course, we don’t face the threats that loomed over Christ’s disciples at the end of his ministry. Still, there is a message for us in this Gospel text.

The lesson reminds us that Christians hold the past in tension with the present and in preparation for the future. We need to have ourselves fully grounded in the past—to “know ourselves,” as the saying goes.

But if we are always *looking* back, we can’t face forward toward the Kingdom of God. Nor can we live in the present and use the present to prepare for the future that God wants us to have.

This philosophical advice is also practical advice. For don’t we often spend too much time living in the past?

Don't we find ourselves thinking about old arguments we had, wondering if we might have said something different? In these mental replays, don't we look for ways that we could have come out ahead?

Or maybe in our minds, we want to fix old relationships that ended long ago. If only we had done something different...

In these cases, we need to figure out how we can process the past. We need to assimilate it so that we can live in the present.

And doing this in a *spiritual* way has additional, spiritual benefits. When we try to assimilate the past by thinking of how God was at work back then, helping us to make the best of things, we can ensure that our present is shaped by good memories.

As I begin planning for my retirement later this year, I find myself doing a lot of looking back! Not surprisingly, some of this remembering is happy, while some is regretful.

Still, the past is past. I need to remind myself that only looking back is a dead-end. My primary challenge is to look forward...

You may have heard this answer to the common question, "How are you?" When someone is asked how they are, they reply, "I'm getting on getting on!"

I like this answer because it recognizes the need to make a few steps in a positive direction. We don't need to dream impossible dreams. As Jesus put it so memorably: "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Each day carries some stress. The best strategy is to cope with our problems, one by one.

And remembering the report that Jesus "set his face" to Jerusalem, we can get some useful inspiration from the word, "set."

A golfer preparing to swing knows that she has to set her feet firmly on the ground in the right position; otherwise, when she hits the ball, it will inevitably go where she didn't want it to go.

By the same token, as we plan to face the future, we need to be set on firm spiritual ground. And that spiritual ground includes the right kind of remembrance.

After all, we are "in Christ," and as St. Paul said, "anyone who is in Christ is a new creation." Even if we don't feel Christian cheeriness at the moment, when we feel confident that we are moving forward, we can hope that things will be better tomorrow!

Resolving to get on with it is a gesture of hope in the future. We are trusting that even if things don't get better, God will be with us.

As a recent book by Lewis Hyde reminds us, forgetting is an *action*. And one way to look at that action is to see it as a step forward--in the right direction. We act to put the past firmly in the past.

By the same token it's helpful to try to remember the right things. Not the mistakes that you regret but the times when you made useful sacrifices for others. The times when God guided and blessed your work. When you were present to a friend who needed a shoulder to cry on.

With the right forgetting and the right remembering, we can get on with it. We can get on with the business of God's Kingdom.

*And now unto that same God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be ascribed as is most justly due all might, majesty, power, dominion, and praise, now and forever. Amen.*