

SERMON

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Luke

SUMMERTIME AND THE LIVIN' IS EASY

Summertime and the livin' is easy. It's a good time to relax, reflect, take account, and maybe discern a plan. What do you want to do with the next year, or five years? What's the plan? What's the path to take? Where are we to look?

(FROM UMBERTO ECO's "Chronicles of a Liquid Society.)

Here's a good start! This is advertised on the internet. See if you can figure out what it is. A Built-in Orderly Organized Knowledge... No wires, no battery, no electronic circuits. no switches or buttons, it is compact and portable—you can even use it while you're sitting in an armchair by the fire. It's a sequence of numbered sheets of recyclable paper, each of which contains thousands of bits of information. These sheets are held together in the correct sequence by an elegant device called a binding. Each page is scanned optically and the information is registered directly in the brain. There is a "browse" control that allows you to pass from one page to another, either forward or back, with a single flick of the finger. By using the "index" feature you can immediately find the information you want on the exact page. You can also buy an accessory called a "BOOK-mark," which enables you to return to where you left off in the previous session, even if the BOOK has been closed. Built-in Orderly Organized Knowledge... whose initials spell out BOOK.

There is also a Portable Erasable-Nib Cryptic Intercommunication Language Stylus — whose initials stand for PENCILS.

Seriously, summer is a wonderful time to do an inventory, reflect on the way things have been going, and make a plan. I was advised years ago by a colleague who was my mentor— "Yes, but what if it doesn't work," I whined. He said, "You make another plan." That's why we use PENCILS. I'm just back from another work time in New York —having to do with the writing and production of the musical— GIVIN IT UP. I saw a remarkable performance, a

READING, funded by the Oregon Shakespeare Festival PLAY ON—which has funded playwrights — to translate into contemporary language. Shakespeare’s 39 plays. Over half of the playwrights they chose are women and people of color. Their purpose is to make Shakespeare ACCESSIBLE to audiences today. (It can be tough-going trying to listen to Shakespeare raw, in 16th century English. and idiom.) I saw the READING production of “The Winter’s Tale” on Friday night. It is the play from which my own original musical has been shaped. It was remarkable, understandable and funny (Shakespeare’s plays are full of humor—it’s just we don’t make the 16th century connections). ACCESSIBLE. That was the goal. *And yet remain true to the original.*

Like Shakespeare, listening to the Gospels can be tough-going. So much of the context in which the Gospels were written seem inaccessible to us. Here’s something that film writers, directors, playwrights and producers use— (also used in business and in software engineering....). It’s a technique that makes it possible to visualize abstractions. It’s about making an abstract idea VISUAL and therefore ACCESSIBLE. It’s called storyboarding. It was a DISNEY ANIMATOR, Webb Smith, who is credited with creating the idea of drawing scenes on separate sheets of paper — storyboards— and pinning them up on a bulletin board to tell a story in sequence. Now, everyone uses it.

I suspect—that three of the four gospel writers where on to this! They often use the same stories, but place them different spots in the overall story, and use them for different purposes and give them different punchlines. Storyboarding. I thought it might be helpful to look at today’s gospel lesson on storyboards.

To visualize an abstract idea. To make the message accessible.

It’s worth a try. What do you see? What I learned from making this storyboard is the directional emphasis of the story. The arrows all point toward forward movement. Avante! Movement Is the message of the story. Quickening. (The term used when a baby’s movement can first be felt in the womb!) “Quickening” toward Jerusalem is the point, the emphasis. It’s a challenging gospel in this way: It focuses on the conflicts we experience and the ways in which our opinions and loyalties are pulled in different directions. Our resistance. Our

hesitation. Our fear. Our ambivalence. It reveals our divided hearts—being pulled in two or more directions! Like James and John, we are often quick to call down fire from heaven to defeat those who disagree with us. But for Jesus, this is not the way. Jerusalem, for Jesus, is about healing and wholeness, mercy and forgiveness, peace, the dignity and holiness of all humanity, reconciliation with God and with each other, overcoming death— life fully lived. Fighting, *or calling down fire from heaven*—these tactics are just a set back.

Jesus will not be deterred. His face is toward Jerusalem. Jerusalem—a place of hope, transformation, fulfillment and new life. Jesus will not be deterred. The arrows show his determination and persistence. *Setting our face toward Jerusalem* is about walking a path of integrity and authenticity. Becoming our best and truest selves? It is less about what we do and accomplish and more about becoming who we were created to be. What distracts us from this:? Jerusalem is about God's dream for our life. (This is the way Desmond Tutu speaks of it.) God's dream for all humanity.

Jesus will not be deterred. The storyboards show that setting our face toward Jerusalem means letting go of the past and the dead places and parts of our lives—the things that no longer give or sustain life and growth. *Setting our face toward Jerusalem* means letting go—of seeking identity from our families, social groups, and political parties. It is an all or nothing proposition.

I've named this set of storyboards, "No Excuses." To follow Jesus into a new and Godly life leaves no room for excuses, justifications, running away, or hiding. Our lives are too important and we matter too much. Jesus will not be deterred. To be confronted with the questions raised by today's gospel is in fact, the beginning of setting our face to go to Jerusalem. Avante. As a congregation. As families. As individuals. As part of a larger Church. To follow Jesus to Jerusalem means our values, and goals, and hopes and dreams are to be shaped and directed by Jesus. What are we to do? Where are we to go? We have some exciting challenges ahead. Our children, and Miss Debbie and her teachers seem to be leading the way! What about you? Where are you headed? Is Jesus leading the way? Our values and our courage are all wrapped up together. No excuses. Just movement. Avante.. Full steam ahead.

AMEN