

Life Group Notes

Sunday 29th November 2020

Speaker: Andy McCullough

Title: Luke: The face of God

Passage: Luke 9: 51-62

Life is lived forwards but understood backwards. We don't know where we are going, but we can reflect on where we have been. More importantly, we don't know where God is going, but we can see where he has been.

1. One Face of God.

The first thing that strikes us in this passage is the word "face." – three times in verses 51-53. **In Jesus, we see the face of God.** In Exodus 33, Moses is told he cannot see God's face, but only God's back. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote,

"We live our lives toward the future, but we understand our lives only in retrospect. Only looking back can we see whether we took the right road, whether a certain decision was justified, whether our dreams were intimations or illusions. Life involves risk, which is why we need faith."

But, when Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem, God is setting his face towards Jerusalem. The disciples probably didn't understand it at the time, but when they looked back, they would have been able to reflect: **Jesus' whole mission** was to be murdered in Jerusalem. **The point of his life was his death.**

2. Two naughty disciples

In the OT the people of God were a specific ethnic group, and there are wars against other ethnic groups. In OT this might have been appropriate, but it is not OK for followers of Jesus – and Jesus rebukes them James and John.

What does this little episode teach us? A) **We don't take revenge.** If someone wrongs us, we overlook, forgive, move on to another village. B) **Prejudice takes a long time to unpick.** C) **Jesus came for all people.** Even the ones you wouldn't normally choose to hang out with. He is making a new family.

3. Three uncommitted followers.

Why these three little stories? Remember God said to Moses "No-one can see me and live?"

Actually that's still true. The face of Jesus is life to us, but death to our old lives. Augustine:

"You see, we are not meant to live in this life in order to see that face, we are meant to die to the world in order to live forever in God. Then we won't sin, not only by deed but even by desire, when we see that face which beats and surpasses all desires. Because it is so lovely, my brothers and sisters, so beautiful, that once you have seen it, nothing else can give you pleasure."

We live for the future, not for the past. We are moving away from death and towards life. If following Jesus isn't costing you some freedoms then maybe you're not doing it properly. But oh grace – it's such a privilege, such a joy to be called follow him. To leave behind death and to pursue life. Dietrich Bonhoeffer: *"Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. Costly grace is the incarnation of God."*

Questions:

1. "In the face of Jesus, we see God." Who do you think Jesus is?
2. Reflect on this difficult year, 2020. Are there ways in which you can discern what God was doing in your life?
3. Why does Jesus rebuke James and John for wanting to call down fire upon the Samaritans? Discuss.
4. Do you find it easy or difficult to forgive people? Why?
5. What is your experience of leaving behind your old life to follow Jesus? Are you ever tempted to look back?