

On April 18 1521, Luther appeared as ordered before the Diet of Worms to account for his 95 theses calling for a reform of the Roman Church. This was a general assembly of the estates of the Holy Roman Empire with Emperor Charles V presiding.

Luther was presented with copies of his writings laid out on a table and asked him if the books were his, and whether he stood by their contents. Luther confirmed he was their author, but requested time to think about the answer to the second question. He prayed, consulted friends, and gave his response the next day. This is what he said:

“Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason, I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. May God help me. Amen. “

The Emperor later declared Luther an outlaw, banning his literature, and requiring his arrest. It became a crime for anyone in Germany to give Luther food or shelter. It permitted anyone to kill Luther without legal consequence. Luther knew he was on a dangerous road, but he set his face toward the future and answered a call to a very difficult task.

Jesus had moved from obscurity to prominence in a matter of months. News of his miraculous healing had spread throughout the region. Crowds flocked to benefit from his powerful presence. His disciples followed him with enthusiasm. The long-awaited kingdom was at hand.

But his fortunes soon began to change. Opposition developed. The crowds got smaller. The zeal of the disciples began to wane. Caesar's reign became more self-evident than God's dawning reign. It was to this background, Luke tells us, that Jesus resolutely "set his face to go to Jerusalem." Why should he spoil success by going to the capital? His strength was in the countryside. But there was no changing his mind. To announce God's reign, he would have to go to the center of earthly power. What caused Jesus to journey to Jerusalem?

**First, he knew who he was.** Someone once asked Martin Luther what gave him the fortitude he needed to challenge the Roman Catholic hierarchy and unjust principalities. His answer: "I have been baptized." His identity came through his relationship with God. When we understand our identity and our belonging, it goes a long way to give us courage.

There are two basic ways of understanding the purpose of the church, God's people, the body of Christ. A common way of thinking is that the church is a service organization, here to serve the needs and desires of it's members. This way of thought says we are Called, Gathered, and Nurtured in the church. This understanding of the church as a service organization, says that we are here solely for the care and feeding of those who come.

There is another understanding of the church as a service organization, one that is true to the Gospels – we are to serve God by serving each other, and the community around us, and the world. We the people of God, the body of Christ, are **Claimed, Gathered, and Sent**. **Claimed** as God's children for a purpose – to be loved and to love. **Gathered** to care, and support, and encourage, to build up and strengthen – and to be equipped. Then we are **Sent** - to be Christ in the world, to give testimony to the power and grace of God in our lives. This is the purpose of our baptism. This is the purpose of the church. This is this purpose of the people of God. Jesus had this sense of purpose, he knew who he was.

**Secondly, he knew where he was going.** Back in the 1960's a movie came out called "The Graduate," which starred a very young Dustin Hoffman as a college student trying to decide what to do with his life. There is a scene early in the movie where Dustin Hoffman is floating on a rubber raft in a swimming pool. His father comes out and asks: "What are you doing." He replies. "Drifting. Just drifting." It was what he was doing with his doing with his life. I fear far too many could give the same answer Just drifting.

Jesus knew where he was going. Literally, of course, to Jerusalem, but figuratively to Calvary and his appointment with a destiny that was uniquely His. By walking toward something he was also walking away from something. He was turning his back to the false gods of popularity, power, and painless piety.

Albert Einstein, the German born mathematician, slowly watched his homeland give in to Adolf Hitler's fascist dictatorship. Einstein wondered if any were going to stand up and oppose Hitler. He said, and I quote, "When Hitlerism came to Germany I expected the Universities to oppose it. Instead they embraced it.

I hoped for the press to denounce it, but instead they propagated its teachings. One by one the leaders and institutions which should have opposed the Nazi philosophy bowed meekly to its authority. Only one institution met it with vigorous opposition and that was the Christian Church."

Einstein confessed, "That which I once despised, I now love with a passion I cannot describe." The commitment of the Church in standing against evil made a profound impression upon Einstein. Those individuals in the 1930's understood the cost associated with their actions, and they did not back down. The church today can do no less.

Listen to me! Righteousness will cost you dearly. When Jesus headed off to Jerusalem he knew where he was going. I think Paul had his Lord's cross in mind when he observed: "Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys; in danger from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:24-28).

Paul sounds like Jesus. He knew where he was going. He knew following Jesus meant danger on all sides.

**Third, Jesus knew who walked with Him.** Far more than the disciples accompanied Him. He walked with the great "I Am," the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In the ancient men of faith we can hear their encouragement. We can hear Daniel say, "He was with me in the lion's den." Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego join in, "He was with us in the fiery furnace." Moses says, "When the Red Sea was in my front and Pharaoh was in my back, He was with me." And then David joins in: "Great is the Lord God of Israel His mercy endures forever." Wherever you go, God goes with you.

At the end of Luke chapter 9 we read this story about Jesus' final approach to Jerusalem. On his way he meets three men who wish to follow him and he warns them that it will cost them dearly to do so. To the three he says, you will be homeless, your family will be left behind, and your past life must be forgotten. As you can imagine the three, who were once so certain, are now hesitant. This story is about commitment or the lack of it. It is about Jesus "setting his face" and three men "turning their heads."

Why did these three hesitate? Because they did not know who walked with them?

For us to be the church, the people of God, the body of Christ – we must know who we are and who we belong to, we must know where we are going in this life and what our destination is, and we must know who walks with us every step in this life.

Do you? Amen.