

June 30, 2019

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Luke 9:51-62

Today's gospel reading took me back to a lesson I learned in grade school but which I apply to things in my life even to this day. In 6th or 7th grade, I was on a 4 x 100 yard relay team and we worked hard at learning the correct technique for passing the baton. Our coach showed us how to receive the pass without looking behind us. And he told us the reason we should not look behind was two-fold: It added time to your run AND you were more likely to go out of your lane and be disqualified. To "not look back" took some trust in the person that was passing the baton on to you. We practiced making those passes without looking behind and eventually our times got better.

In today's gospel, I think Jesus is trying to tell us something similar to what my middle school track coach was trying to tell me: Once you know where you want to go, don't look behind. It will only get you off track.

I've never done any real farming but I've heard that if you are plowing a field using a horse or an ox if you look back, you'll move the reigns that guide the animal. Just a slight movement of the reigns, and the horse or ox goes to the right or to the left. What you end up with is a field that has furrows that are not straight.



Does this mean that we should NEVER look back? I don't think so. Jesus does in other passages, encourage us to be reflective. But, as in many things in life, there is a time and a place for looking back. If we look back too soon, we can end up being distracted. In the first part of the gospel, the disciples seem more concerned about the reaction of the Samaritans than Jesus is. The disciples want to make a point and suggest that calling down fire might be the appropriate response. Jesus tells the disciples to move on.

Jesus' words at the end of the gospel could be interpreted in a harsh way. We should not interpret the words too literally. Are there times for mourning and for family? Of course! But we also need to give priority to following Jesus. The call for me in today's gospel is to be as focused as possible on being a disciple of Jesus. When other things look like better options, or distractions start to move me off path, Jesus' words are meant to keep me moving forward. If we practice being a good disciple in the small things of life, it can pay off in the more important decisions of life.