

Blogging toward Sunday

By [William H. Willimon](#)

June 25, 2007

It seems strange to be reading a tough text like Luke 9:51-62 during the gentle days of early summer. Most of our congregations are in relaxed, vacation mode. And into these mellow summer days is shoved a gospel that speaks of the stark demands of discipleship. Jesus has set his face toward Jerusalem, but he is no passive victim of state-sponsored violence. He is no automaton or robot trudging his way toward his fate. He has resolutely decided to go to Jerusalem. And we know what this means he is going to his death.

Those of us who live in a “culture of victimization” ought to take note.

Jesus is not simply a victim of evil and violence; he is marching to engage the enemy. He is thus portrayed—not as a victim—but as a potential victor. Jesus is going to take charge. So must we. When Christians preach nonviolence as a way of life, when we practice peacemaking, we do so not as helpless doormats for the jackboots of the world but in order to subvert the world, to participate in the victory of Jesus.

I know a woman who has been not only terribly disappointed by her young adult son, but also emotionally abused by him, even physically abused by him on one occasion. Over a year ago he stormed out of the house, slammed the door and left in a rage. Shortly thereafter he was sent to jail for a year, having burglarized to support his drug habit.

What does the mother do? She goes to the jail every week. For the first couple of weeks he refused to see her; then, when he relented and met with her in the visitation room, the guards had to remove him because of his abusive language toward her. She came back the next week. Eventually, he relented and now she comes and they talk quietly together. She is the only person who ever visits him.

“I am determined not to give him the last word,” she says. “I am not going to let him define this situation. I’ve got a claim on his life, and I intend to collect.”

She illustrates Jesus’ resolute determination as he sets his face toward Jerusalem, and is unwilling to let an emperor or empire have the last word. Someday, I want to tell that mother this story about Jesus. I think she would understand why we call such a story, prelude to torture and death at Jerusalem, “good news.”

A couple of people come up to Jesus and wanted to be part of his movement, but they have a few commitments to take care of before they join him in his march to Jerusalem. One has to bury his recently deceased father. The other must bid farewell to the folks at home. And after all, doesn’t scripture tell us to honor Mom and Dad? Aren’t “family values” a good thing?

Jesus will have none of it. With a brusque “Let the dead bury their dead,” he moves on without them. It’s a tough text for a gentle summer’s Sunday.