

Sermon ☩ June 26, 2022

Luke 9:51-62

Frank Maxwell

Set in the year, 2010, the Woody Allen film, *Midnight in Paris*, is the story of a nostalgic screenwriter who, while on a trip to Paris with his fiancé's family, finds himself mysteriously going back to the 1920's every day at midnight.

Gil Pender, played by Owen Wilson, is a successful but distracted Hollywood screenwriter, who is drawn to the romance and glamour of the 1920's, while his fiancé, Inez, constantly dismisses his nostalgic love of Paris.

One evening, friends invite Inez and Gil to go dancing. Inez accepts but Gil declines and chooses to return to the hotel through the streets of Paris, eventually becoming lost. As he stops, bells chime midnight and an antique car pulls up, and the passengers dressed in 1920's clothing urge Gil to join them. They go to a bar, where Gil comes to realize that he has been transported to the 1920's, the very era he admires and idolizes. He encounters Cole Porter, Josephine Baker, along with Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald, who take him to meet Ernest Hemingway. However, late that evening as soon as he leaves the bar, he finds he has returned to 2010.

Over the next few days, Gil spends each night in the past, transported in the antique auto. Eventually he meets, Adrianna, Pablo Picasso's mistress with whom he spends increasing amounts of time. And one evening as he confesses his love for her, a horse and carriage appears. They are invited inside by a richly-dressed couple and are transported further back to the era Adriana considers Paris's Golden Age. They are taken to the famous Maxim's Paris restaurant, and meet Toulouse-Lautrec, Gauguin and Degas. When Gil asks them what they thought the best era was, the three determine that the greatest era was the Renaissance. The enthralled Adriana is offered a job designing ballet costumes, and proposes to Gil that they stay, but Gil realizes that despite the allure of nostalgia, it is better to accept the present for what it is. Adriana elects to stay in the past, and they sadly part ways.

How often do we, likewise, look to the past perhaps through the filter of rose-colored glasses? Jesus addressed the importance of looking forward when he said; "*No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.*"

Interesting words . . . sharp words . . . poignant words that speak to us specifically about the nature of the kingdom of God and the nature of Christian commitment.

A hallmark of the kingdom of God is hopefulness. Once we have caught the vision of the kingdom, there can be no looking back. To look back is to intimidate the vision, for the vision of the kingdom is always precarious. *And . . . if we are not obedient to it when it does come, it is soon lost.*

Jesus warns that if one even looks back, that person is not fit for the kingdom. But hang on, I don't believe that Jesus was discounting the importance of the historical perspective. The past is helpful as a guidepost, but, when it becomes a hitching post, it serves as an obstacle to moving forward.

Our faith requires us to be open to the demands of the present and sensitive to the challenges of the future. Life should never become a conforming to the past.

Did you hear about the teacher who taught for thirty years? Some say he did not have thirty years of experience, rather, he had the same experience thirty times.

A congregation can also become stagnant, having the same experience over and over rather than pioneering in mission and education and worship.

Jesus further contended that if we think only in terms of the "yesterdays", we're dead. Think of all the congregations where growth *and the Gospel* are stifled because new ideas are always greeted by: "*We've never done it that way before.*"

Are we always going to be looking back? Or are we going to be open to the future in such a way that God's kingdom and fellowship can come.

How many of us spend our lives holding funerals rather than celebrating the life that is now and is to come.

"Let the dead bury the dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Jesus is not advocating irresponsibility toward family . . . he is declaring how we can be most fully responsible. He is indicating that life is a matter of priorities.

If you have discovered the way that leads to life, then it is your responsibility to share it. True commitment demands a *burning-your-bridges-behind-you* kind of thinking.

In relationships . . . "*If only I had married _____ instead of _____.*"

In our work . . . "*I should have taken that job or why didn't I major in English instead the essentials of witchcraft?*"

Christian commitment involves looking forward to renewal and change and possibility.

The question for the day:

Does the Church challenge people to be pioneers of the spirit and mind; or, are we quite content in paddling around in the shallows of civilization?

Are we challenging persons to mature in mind, spirit, and emotion; or, are we merely catering to their likes and dislikes because we want to keep everyone happy?

We must reject the conventional fiction of unchanging human nature, there is, in fact, no such permanence anywhere . . . *and that's okay.*