

One morning, when the kids were little, I woke up with a vivid dream that featured a lizard who was belittling me. It was one of those lovely mornings when I had time to myself, and, as I was jogging through the streets of the neighborhood, there, on the ground, was a plastic figure that looked just like the lizard in my dream. I was so shocked, I picked it up and brought it home. When I got there, the kids said to me, "That's Randall. He's from Monster's Inc." I had never seen the movie Monster's Inc, so, of course, we had to watch it. Come to find out Randall is the villain: the slimy, no good, awful bad guy. Hmmm.

Well, over the years, Randall has come to be my constant companion. He sits on my windowsill and reminds me everyday of the lizard voice I have inside of me that would like me to expend a lot of time on condemnation, especially self-condemnation. "You aren't smart enough for the project coming up." "You

are a terrible mother. A good mother would....”
“if you loved God enough you would....”

I have learned, over the years, to thank Randall for his contribution to the conversation of my life, but tell him that he is not invited into the driver’s seat. Because there is always another voice inside of me that is the beloved and beloved-ing voice: “This project is really stretching you, look at the opportunities that it presents. You are growing.” “Parenting is challenging, yes, this is a tricky spot, and let’s see where you can get support... “ “You love God enough, you can rest in God’s guidance....”

Today I want us to look at the gospel and see the difference between reading it with Randall’s voice or with a different voice. This gospel reading contains some of what I like to call “the hard sayings of Jesus”. We tend to go to these scriptures and read them prescriptively, as if they are telling us what to do, instead of descriptively, telling us who we

are and how the spiritual life works. The prescriptive voice has the sense of Randall about it and leads us to dead ends. The descriptive voice is that which allows for the door to open to our lives and assists us in living into our life with God. Galatians tells us today that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control. When we are reading a passage descriptively, then these are what we encounter.

Read prescriptively we get caught on the phrases “let the dead bury their own dead.” “No one who puts his hand to the plow is fit for the Kingdom of God.” We feel confused. Is this the same Jesus who welcomes sinners and the broken into his presence? Is this the same Jesus who spoke the Sermon on the Mount? I thought that Jesus came to replace the image of God in the old testament as vengeful and punishing? What am I supposed to do with the dead? We are off and running, wondering if somehow we have it wrong, feeling as though

we can never live up to these demands that seem counter to our very being. We become alienated from God and alienated from ourselves and each other.

Now let's read this descriptively. Look at the story. It says "When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem". He set his face to go to Jerusalem. He knew that he was walking into this next chapter. The writer of the gospel gives us this descriptive phrase, sets the context, tells us that now, whatever we see or hear Jesus do, from this point on, we read it through this lens, of Jesus going to Jerusalem, going towards the pivotal moment. What happens when his face is set this way: there is no time to deal with the Samaritans who weren't ready for him. He had no place to lay his head. If those around him were to come with him to Jerusalem, there is no space for burying the dead, for saying good-bye to relatives, to put hand to the plow and look back. At this moment, at this time, in the

time towards Jerusalem, there is only forward momentum. This forward momentum is where to find the kingdom of God, so, “come on.”

Read descriptively we don't get caught in a sidebar conversation about our understanding of God. We only feel the momentum of Jesus and walk with him. We love him more.

Jerusalem. We all have our Jerusalem moments in life. This passage tells us what they are like and tells us how we will be. I know that when my brother called the other day to say that my dad in Connecticut was in the Emergency Room, that was a mini-Jerusalem moment. All else fell away from my concentration. Here's another example: I know part of the team that is working on building the new Children's Hospital in Northwest Arkansas. For them, their concentration and efforts are so focused that there is very little else going on in their lives. For those entering rehab and twelve-step

programs, that focus, especially initially, has to be razor sharp. Jerusalem moments. What are they like? They are time-limited. They carry with them an energy that puts everything else aside.

What happens in these moments? What does this passage tell us about them? It tells us that when we are in a set our eyes on a Jerusalem moment, all else will fall away from us and that it is ok to say to those around us. "Right now I am doing this, Come with me if you can, stay here if you must, but I am on the way.

So, prescriptive or descriptive? This distinction helps so much in reading Scripture. Let's remember it. Let's remember Randall and let's remember the fruit of the Spirit. As we look at Scripture, let's come with a curious mind and ask "How is it here that we find love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control?" Where is the wisdom here? What

brings me or us closer to God and our walk with God? Randall and his voice inside of us and our churches is not going away, but let's practice thanking him for his insight and telling him that he doesn't get to drive the bus.