

## **Focused Martyrs**

*June 27, 2010*

(Pentecost 5 – St. Alban’s Day – Year C)

Luke 9:51-62

*St. Alban’s Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

Some of you might know that about 18 months ago, my youngest son, John, and I took golf lessons.

Ever since we have taken golf lessons, we have been trying to play golf every so often at one of our local golf courses.

Of course, the golf swing and stance are essential to being successful at golf.

When you put a golf club into your hands, there are so many different things to remember and to focus on.

You have to focus on your grip and you have to focus on your stance and you have to focus on your swing and you have to focus on the ball.

I have gotten where I can tell, mentally, when I begin my swing, if it is going to be a decent drive or if I am going to shank the ball into the woods.

Lately, one of my mistakes is that I lift my head up during my swing instead of keeping my eyes focused on the ball.

When I do this, my 15-year old son, John, is very quick to point out my mistakes.

John will say:

“Dad, you did it again.

You popped your head up.

How many times do I have to tell you?

Keep your eyes focused on the ball.”

Jesus is a man who knows about keeping his eyes focused on the ball.

The writer of the Gospel of Luke, in chapter 9, tells us this about Jesus:

“When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

Then Jesus goes into a village of non-Jews, in Samaria.

Yet Jesus keeps his focus, as Luke once again tells us that:  
“Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem.”

Jesus not only set his face toward Jerusalem,  
Some translators say the Jesus *resolutely* set his face toward Jerusalem.  
In fact, some translators even say that Jesus *stiffened* his face to go to  
Jerusalem.

However we translate Jesus’ phrase, we know that Jesus’ mission, Jesus’  
purpose, was to keep his eyes focused, firmly and resolutely, on  
the ball.

And Jesus keeps his focus, all the way to Jerusalem, to the place where  
Jesus would willingly submit to death on the cross, to show us how  
much God loves us.

Jesus keeps his focus on God.

And he keeps his focus on his love for you and for me.

Today in our church, we celebrate St. Alban’s Day.

In the Episcopal Church, we do not worship saints and we do not pray to  
them.

However, we do recognize that saints are real people who lived real lives  
- and their real stories are examples that we can learn from.

St. Alban was a real man who lived a real life and who made a real  
choice.

Alban made a choice based upon his focus.

Alban lived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century in what is now England.

The city where Alban lived was ruled by the Romans and Alban  
worshiped Roman gods.

One day, Alban was visited by a Christian priest, a priest who was  
fleeing persecution.

This priest began to teach Alban about the Christian faith.

Alban was then converted and was baptized by the priest as a Christian.

When the Roman authorities came after this priest, Alban hid the priest  
in his house.

Eventually the Roman authorities discovered that a Christian priest was

hiding out at Alban's house.  
So Alban exchanged clothes with the priest.  
The real priest escaped.  
And Alban, dressed in priest's clothing, was captured by the Romans  
and put on trial before a Roman judge.

When he arrived at his trial, the judge asked Alban a question:

"What is your family and race?"

Alban replied:

"How does my family concern you?"

If you wish to know the truth about my religion, know that I am a  
Christian and am ready to do a Christian's duty."

Yet the judge insisted:

"I demand to know your name - tell me at once."

Alban kept his focus, he kept his eye on the ball, he set his face firmly  
and resolutely toward Jerusalem and the Cross,

And he answered the judge, saying:

"My parents named me Alban.

And I worship and adore the true and living God, who created all  
things."

Because of his witness and his focus on the Christian God, Alban was  
then tortured.

And, in the year 304 AD, on June 22nd, which is now his feast day,  
Alban was killed, by having his head cut off.

Because Alban died for his new Christian faith, we say that Alban was a  
martyr.

A martyr is someone sheds their blood and dies for their faith.

Because the color of blood is red, whenever we remember the focus and  
the faith of Christian martyrs, those are days that we use the color  
red in our worship.

It is for this reason that many in this church today are wearing red.

And it is why I am wearing a red stole, because today we are celebrating  
St. Alban's Day.

Today is the day that we are remembering that Alban was a martyr, who  
kept his eyes focused on the love of the Cross.

The word “martyr” is actually derived from a Greek word that means: a first-hand witness.

Originally, the word “martyr” did not mean someone who was killed for their faith.

A martyr originally meant a witness for their faith.

Alban was a witness to the sacrificial love he had for his new Christian brother, the priest whom he exchanged clothes with.

And Alban gave his very own life as a witness, as an example, of God’s sacrificial love on the Cross.

My brothers and sisters of St. Alban’s, we, also, are called to be witnesses to the true and living God who created all things.

We, also, are to keep our eyes focused on God’s sacrificial love.

You probably aren’t called to exchange clothes with your priest and get your head chopped off.

But we are all called to be a witness of our faith.

So, keep your eye on the ball and be a witness.

Love people whom no one wants to love: the grouchy, the annoying and those who are difficult to live with.

Keep your eye on the ball and be a witness.

And tell everyone you meet: at the dentist’s office, at HEB, at the gym - that you are part of an incredible community of love that is called St. Alban’s Episcopal Church.

People of St. Alban’s:

Set your face resolutely toward Jerusalem.

Keep your eye focused on the love of Jesus on the Cross.

And be a witness,

A witness to God’s amazing love.

AMEN.