**St. Aidan’s Episcopal Church**

**The Third Sunday after Pentecost**

**Proper 8**

[**2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14**](https://lectionarypage.net/YearC_RCL/Pentecost/CProp8_RCL.html#ot1)[**Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20**](https://lectionarypage.net/YearC_RCL/Pentecost/CProp8_RCL.html#ps1)[**Galatians 5:1,13-25**](https://lectionarypage.net/YearC_RCL/Pentecost/CProp8_RCL.html#nt1)[**Luke 9:51-62**](https://lectionarypage.net/YearC_RCL/Pentecost/CProp8_RCL.html#gsp1)

**Journey to Jerusalem**

A journey could take us around the world in 80 days or from moment to moment.  It depends on where it is we want to go and how focused we are on getting to our desired destination.  All that being true, however, when we think of a journey, or taking a journey, we think of travelling beyond home and all that is familiar, perhaps to visit or revisit another well-loved place, or perhaps to discover a part of the world we’ve never seen before.

Regardless of which is true in our experience, we are all familiar with setting out on a journey.  And once we set out, we should not be surprised by things that will arise along the way.  Challenges, changes in the weather which affects travel time and connections, lost luggage or dropped phone or computer, meeting new people, being assisted by a stranger with whom we never thought we would find common ground, destined now to become a new friend for life.  One never knows.

Some of these encounters, or others like them, are inevitable when one is on a journey, but it is in the overcoming of them, with patience and acceptance, humor and openness, or even with anger and confusion, that we are changed by them and their outcomes.  There is no doubt that we will be in some way changed by our experiences.  We will no longer be the same people we were when we started out on our journey. A transformation, major or minor, will have taken place.

Jesus and his disciples are on their own journey, and now the time has come for Jesus to “set his face to go to Jerusalem.”  To set his face is to set his focus.  Jesus now has no interest in being distracted from his appointed destination.  Luke’s Gospel is moving toward journey’s end for Jesus, and much of scholarship refers to this series of scriptures as Luke’s Travel Narrative. Jesus is travelling from Galilee to Jerusalem, from the north to the south, from prophet to Messiah, from life to death, from death to resurrection.

The band of people who are travelling with Jesus will be affected by all that they encounter with Jesus along the way, as they become more than mere bystanders and are transformed into true people of The Way.  They will become real disciples, understanding at last, all that Jesus has been teaching them about the deep and profound mystery of what we know as Christian faith, and all that we are called upon by God to do and to be during our journey through life on earth.

Like the disciples, and every faithful heart in the early Church, we too, can think of ourselves as people of The Way.  It’s a defining phrase, that speaks to forward movement, and journeying onward.  There is nothing static about it.  It is not an immoveable place or thing, it is a movement, as our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry refers to as the “Jesus Movement of the Episcopal Church.”  We are not called to stay in one place, but rather to discover who we really are as we grow deeper into the real meaning of what we call our faith journey.  Of one thing there is no doubt, we who identify with Christ and his message of sacrifice and love are on a journey like no other and. as Christians, followers of Christ, people of The Way, our journey will never be without challenge.

Yet challenge and difficulties pale when compared to the promise of transformation from troubled souls to hearts filled with joyful purpose due to love of God that comes with discipleship. We are just as well qualified to be chosen to follow Jesus, just as were those with him as their own journey took them from Galilee to Samaria – enemy territory to the Jews of Jerusalem.  Here were Jews of Samaria, a different orthodoxy, filled with hate for the destruction of their temple during a war with the Jews of Jerusalem.  One wonders why Jesus decided to take this route, but then if he had not, how would his disciples have learned the lessons he had to teach them.  So, trying to travel through Samaria without encountering some sort of confrontation would be like all of us trying to march, uninvited, through a war zone of our own time.  It was no different then as it is now.  As we well know, there are places in the world deemed not safe for travel even for the most innocent of reasons.

But it is precisely on the road southward through the heart of this enemy country that Jesus decides to travel as he keep moving forward, setting his face toward Jerusalem.  Luke makes it clear he and his people are not welcome and the disciples respond with un-Christlike demeanor by totally losing control, becoming all worked up and ready to do serious battle, and turning to Jesus saying, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?”

What?  If Jesus wasn’t Jesus….  Well. Jesus was Jesus and he must have turned eyes to heaven, not to pray, but to ask God if he had made a serious mistake when he asked these dumbbells to follow him.

I mean, Luke merely mentioned that the Samarians did not receive them.  And the only thing the disciples can think of is to have Jesus, the Prince of Peace, send down some hell-fire to consume them.  Here is a case of desired punishment far exceeding a crime. Perhaps we should take heed of our own reactions to imagined aggression toward us, and wait for when that aggression is real.

Well.  Jesus didn’t just say no, he rebuked them, and just for the record, the Greek verb “to rebuke” is another word used when one is confronted with demons.  The demons were alive and well in the disciples and Jesus not only recognized them, he wanted no part of them.

Therein lies the lesson for us.  To follow Christ, to journey with Christ, to belong to the people of The Way, is to turn away from confrontation filled with hatred, revenge, judgement and resentment.  The disciples learned something about themselves and about the meaning of discipleship that day, and we are recipients of their lesson.

To be a Christian isn’t easy and the road one travels presents plenty of opportunities to fail in our quest to be more loving and less filled with rage or hate.  To be vehicles of reconciliation, not retaliation.  To love and pray for our enemies, even though that is a very hard thing to do.  We may not have to love them in the same way we love our family and friends, but we love them as Christ loves us, sacrificing our pride and ego, our need to put them down, praying that they will find their own way to the feet of a merciful God.  Walking with Jesus through enemy country, the disciples learned this difficult lesson and it was no easier for them than it is for us and we know there is a huge difference between understanding this and actually living into the hard reality, of what we call, agape love.

We must make no mistake; we are on the same journey with Jesus.  As people of The Way, we are not here to simply worship Jesus, we are called to follow Jesus, walking through enemy territory of, not just one, but many Samaria’s.  Worshiping Jesus offers us a kind of peace that is serenely spiritual, passive and holy.  When we decide to follow Jesus, walking through dark times, politically charged times, dangerous and confusing times, our decision will make good on its promise of a kind of peace that is marked by challenge and conflict. As we move forward along our Christian road, we learn more about ourselves, who we really are, how we really are, and who we are called to be.  There is so much about ourselves we are called to drop away, to let go of, and so much we are called to take up regardless of our reluctance to do so.

We are to let go our anger and resentment, and to gather into ourselves resources for forgiveness, mercy, grace and love.  It is a formula that has never been easy for humankind from the beginning of time, for the time of the disciples and in our own time.   While worship and following offer us a both/and opportunity, at some point, we must become more conscious of the choices we make from moment to moment of which it is and what difference it is making in our life of faith.

To live without either of these is, in the way that Jesus describes it metaphorically, is to be spiritually dead.  To be dead to the opportunity of finding joy in sacrificial love, to finding peaceful grace in the midst of conflict and to finding loving friendship and openness of heart.  How sad to miss an opportunity to be alive in the Lord rather than dead in the spirit.

But, no matter when or who, those who have heard and do hear the transforming message of Christ may be the only hope for the world in the time to come.  Jesus knows it and says as much to earthly desires which place themselves above our desires to follow Christ.

Jesus never judged one way or the other, never judged the degree to which we could willingly offer ourselves to his ministry and message.  He could only advise that, as his disciple, you set your face toward your own Jerusalem without the need to glance backward.  As people of The Way, you have no need to cling to your life in the past, no need to keep looking in the rear view mirror of your life, or to continually reflect on the good old days of the past.  It is one thing to remember with fondness where we have come from, yet quite another to look only there, ignoring all which lies before us.

Jesus is asking you to follow him on a journey toward a new future, which begs the question: what and where is your Jerusalem?  What is the Jerusalem that is at the heart of living for you?  Is it where career or status or power or pride rule whether politically, privately, religiously or personally?  Or is it where family, virtue or the image of God are found?  Which of these will you lay down, as you journey on, or which will you pick up?

Whatever, it might be, it is time to stand up and set your face toward your own Jerusalem.   No more putting it off.  Even if it is the first time you have ever travelled there and you are uncertain of the way, be assured that if you set your face toward it with Christ, it will be well worth the trip.

Amen.

Written to the Glory of God

E. J. R Culver

June 26, 2022