

Sunday, June 26, 2022 – “On the Road with Jesus”
– Bible Study & Reflection on Luke 9:51-62

Dear Members & Friends:

I invite you to read the following passage from Luke 9:51-62 (*Common English Bible*).

⁵¹ As the time approached when Jesus was to be taken up into heaven, he determined to go to Jerusalem. ⁵² He sent messengers on ahead of him. Along the way, they entered a Samaritan village to prepare for his arrival, ⁵³ but the Samaritan villagers refused to welcome him because he was determined to go to Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ When the disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to consume them?” ⁵⁵ But Jesus turned and spoke sternly to them, ⁵⁶ and they went on to another village.

⁵⁷ As Jesus and his disciples traveled along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

⁵⁸ Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and the birds in the sky have nests, but the Human One^(a) has no place to lay his head.”

⁵⁹ Then Jesus said to someone else, “Follow me.”

He replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

⁶⁰ Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead. But you go and spread the news of God’s kingdom.”

⁶¹ Someone else said to Jesus, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say good-bye to those in my house.”

⁶² Jesus said to him, “No one who puts a hand on the plow and looks back is fit for God’s kingdom.”

This Sunday’s Gospel depicts Jesus as one who is now engaged in his final, climactic journey to Jerusalem, and we all know what awaits him there. Jesus has been upfront with his disciples about the suffering that lies ahead (Luke 9:21-27, 44-45). They have said that Jesus is the Messiah (Luke 9:18-20) and have dramatically witnessed his transfiguration on the mountaintop with Moses and Elijah (Luke 9:28-36), so they just can’t imagine that Jesus’ mission will end in violence or death. Still, Jesus is “determined to go” toward Jerusalem, and he knows the fate that awaits him there.

Perhaps his premonition of what lies ahead accounts for Jesus’ seeming avoidance of the Samaritans he encounters along the road to Jerusalem. And yet, Jesus does travel through Samaria and enters a Samaritan village. The Samaritans “refused to welcome him because he was determined to go to Jerusalem.” Why didn’t the Samaritans receive Jesus? While Luke doesn’t explicitly tell us why the Samaritans didn’t receive Jesus, maybe it was due to the destruction of a Samaritan Temple around 128 B.C.E. by the Jewish ruler, John Hyrcanus, because he saw it as an unholy rival to the true Jerusalem Temple. A sure-fire way to get a group of people to really hate you is to destroy their place of worship! In fact, the dislike between Jews and Samaritans was so bad that in Jesus’ day, many Jews avoided traveling through Samaria altogether. They would take a long detour around the whole country. There was sort of an unofficial travel advisory saying it was unsafe for Jews to travel through Samaria. Then, as now, there are just some places in the world where it is not safe to go.

The disciples James and John take the Samaritans lack of receptiveness as a rejection of Jesus and therefore ask if they should “call fire down” to destroy them, as Elijah did, when God’s

prophet incinerated the soldiers of King Ahaziah, who reigned in the northern kingdom (2 Kings 1:10-12).

This exchange leads Jesus to comment on the high cost of discipleship and the fate that may await the disciples because they follow him. Let the dead bury the dead. Leave home and move out with me on perilous waters. Jesus warns, “No one who puts a hand on the plow and looks back is fit for God’s kingdom.” It’s as if Jesus is saying, “Keep looking head, don’t waste time looking back, move on, dare to follow me into my promised future.”

It’s summer, yes, and perhaps we all deserve a break, a vacation, a road trip, a respite from the rigors of discipleship. Perhaps. But Jesus doesn’t do vacations from his imperative to, “Follow me!” Jesus warns us to count the cost and then reassures us that we, even us, have what it takes to step up and venture out in discipleship.

Yes, Jesus calls us to follow him, to join him in his journey to the cross. Yet being a traveling companion of Jesus is not cost-free. Jesus’ Way is not only perilous, when compared with the world’s ways, but also, he is a demanding travel guide. In following Jesus’ Way, something is gained – the new life of forgiveness and love – but something may be lost – the old ways of anger and hatred.

On a dusty road, in the middle of a hostile, Middle-Eastern country, some followers of Jesus asked, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” Jesus turned and spoke sternly to them. And they went on to another village. As they were going along the road, they met another person. And Jesus said to him, ‘Follow me.’”

Along the road of our lives, Jesus says to us, “Follow my Way of living.” May it be so. Amen.

Grace & Peace,

Pastor Greg Rupright