

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14
Luke 9: 51-62
Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church
June 27, 2010

The first thing I want you to notice about the passage from Luke is to note his intentional linking of Jesus with his ancestor Elijah. In the passage we heard from 2 Kings Elijah is “taken up” in to heaven. This has happened to no other figure in the Old Testament and is a unique sign of God’s favor.

In the passage preceding the one we just heard from Luke, Elijah and Moses appear with Jesus on a mountain in the event we call the Transfiguration. According to Luke Elijah and Moses speak with Jesus about “his departure which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” This is clearly a reference to Jesus’ death resurrection and ascension—when Jesus will be “taken up into heaven.”

As this morning’s readings illustrate, the themes and stories of the two Testaments are richly and intimately intertwined. If we ignore the story from 2 Kings we will miss the profound and nourishing waters which bring life and understanding to the account of Luke.

We can now see that the story of Jesus has a much bigger setting than his journey to Jerusalem. The mantle of authority which Elijah threw upon Elisha has been cast from the distance of centuries upon the shoulders of Jesus. Thus as he sets his face toward Jerusalem, Jesus not only adopts the identity of Elijah, he, even more importantly, carries Elijah’s mission which is to restore Israel to faithful relationship to the Covenant God made with Moses; and through that to restore Israel’s relationship with the God who in love created them.

It is this fact that explains the disturbing incidents which attend Jesus as he and his disciples pass through Samaria. There is a shocking withholding of hospitality and evidence of hostility toward Jesus. This is particularly confusing since throughout his ministry Jesus has made a point of affirming the Samaritans as worthy people who in many cases are more faithful to the covenant than their estranged cousins, the Jews.

How can this be? The answer is that Jesus' face is "set toward Jerusalem." If all we had to work with was the New Testament we might assume that their hostility was related to the fact that, in heading to Jerusalem, Jesus was facing his death and thus he was someone from whom they wanted to keep their distance.

No, to be honest there may be some truth to this. After all, how many times have we or people we have known experienced isolation and even rejection with the development of a serious illness. People with AIDS, cancer, debilitating strokes, disfiguring diseases and injuries, people with severe forms of mental illness all have experienced a community which once surrounded them disappear. Instead they are surrounded by silence and whispers. The phone stops ringing. People are polite but keep their distance. This not only happens to people with illness but people suffering profound loss. The presence of illness and death brings in many of us a deep fear reaction. It is I suggest a response to our own fear of death and illness. While we rationally know that we cannot "catch" cancer or life altering disease and injury from another, the mere visible presence of someone afflicted is deeply threatening. We don't want to feel the feelings; we do not want to think too much because we realize that we too might suffer such a fate.

Thus we distance ourselves emotionally and in some cases even justify that the one afflicted must have brought the illness upon themselves. With this thought we

comfort ourselves because, if this is true, then the calamity. As we perceive it to be, cannot happen to us.

But actually there is a deeper more historical reason for the Samaritans' lack of hospitality. The fact is that they feel slighted. For the Samaritans the true worship of God is on Mt. Gerzim where Jacob settled and offered sacrifices to God. The fact that Jesus is headed to die in Jerusalem and upon Mt. Zion for them is a sign that their worship is faulty, inadequate and not acknowledged by God. This is an ancient rift that in fact preceded the Jewish exile in Babylon 500 years earlier. It is a wound that has festered through the centuries and has been reinforced by the Jerusalem Jews who have lorded it over the Samaritans for centuries.

Yet while the disciples want to call down fire and brimstone upon the Samaritans for this hostility, Jesus turns and rebukes them. This is a moment of sharp reprimand. When Jesus hears these words his reaction is instantaneous. The action stops. He turns and faces them and lets them have it. Why?

Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and to the Cross is in part about the salvation of individual souls; but it is also about the healing of the nations. It is about the full revealing of the Kingdom of God when all nations shall submit to the rule of the one true ruler of the universe.

Therefore calling down curses upon a nation or group of people is not only an act of aggression against that nation or people. It is an attack upon God's kingdom. Any time we utter curses upon other peoples or nations we participate in the conflict. For the Christian who seeks to witness to the reality of God's kingdom there is no room to curse even our nation's bitterest enemies. We may enjoy fantasies of terrible things happening

to Osama Bin Laden and the Taliban; but this only perpetuates the hatred and the conflict. We may be emotionally identified with one side or the other in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; but there is no room to lift up the one and vilify the other. Instead we are to recognize the conflict for what it is—deep and wounding suffering that no amount of guns, bombs and angry speeches can resolve. Which political solutions can succeed only when accompanied by a spiritual transformation. And this transformation is not simply required of Israeli's and Palestinians; it is required of all people and nations who are emotionally, financially and militarily invested in the conflict.

I propose that Jesus has all this in mind as he sets his face toward Jerusalem. As he contemplates the cross and his divine mission to restore communion between God, humanity and the earth, he sees beyond his death to the healing of the world community and every broken soul that dwells within that community. Jesus resurrection, his ascension and the gift of the Holy Spirit accomplish the eventual victory of the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. But he needs believers who believe and who commit their lives to the way of Christ's peace.

The words of Francis Ridley Havergal challenges us:.

Who is on the Lord's side? Who will serve the King?
Who will be His helpers, other lives to bring?
Who will leave the world's side? Who will face the foe?
Who is on the Lord's side? Who for Him will go?
By Thy call of mercy, by Thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side—Savior, we are Thine!