

Luke 9: 51-56
June 30, 2013
Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church
Commissioning Sunday

On Friday I had my monthly meeting with my spiritual director. In listening to my hopes for Keni, Carl and my journey to Chituka Village, she asked me what I wanted to receive from God in and through this experience. This was not any easy question to answer; and it took some searching to find a response. I began by talking about coming to live in a wider world. By that I meant a world that is larger than that shaped by my almost exclusive experience of American and European culture. This led me to recognize that as a Christian I am called primarily to be a citizen of the Kingdom of God, a realm which has a higher claim on my life even than that of my nationality.

Yet even as I explored that thought I realized that what I was talking about was nothing short of transformation. After all, we cannot escape who we are and the culture that shapes us. We may travel the world and become more cosmopolitan—more broadly aware of the diversity of culture in the world. But we still retain our essential orientation. We are still see life from the perspective of where we come from. Indeed, there is temptation *not* to enter into a different culture *too* deeply for we fear losing the familiarity of our orientation. So we do not enter into a community too deeply; we do not open our hearts too widely; we do not allow the lives and traditions to come too close that they might actually *touch and transform* our way of looking at the world. It may be edifying to take an excursion to another culture halfway around the world and to garner inspiring stories about *those people over there*. But as long as we are primarily

counting on returning to the familiarity of the home we left there will be no transformation—no encounter with *real* people and certainly no *authentic* encounter with the living God.

Today's passage comes from the calendar of appointed readings for today. I did not choose it. And when you heard it, you may have thought, "This is a strange text to choose on the eve of this adventure!" That at least was my reaction!

On the surface the episode describes Jesus and his disciples traveling through a region and being denied hospitality by the people who live there. Is this the expectation we take with us to Chituka Village? That we will be received with hostility and suspicion? Hardly! Every communication for the last two years of preparation has been nothing but warm and welcoming. There is great anticipation that strangers from far away would come to share in the life of their community.

And yet, I would be dishonest if I did not own up to some apprehension about how we will be received; or, more accurately, how we will be able to accept the hospitality that will be offered. Actually I see this as a gift of preparation. The apprehension is a *good* thing if it leads to humility. We are not going to offer our great wisdom to a needy community. We are going as human beings seeking to encounter brothers and sister human beings. More than this, we are traveling a great distance to meet brothers and sisters with whom we share the deepest possible bond. We are citizens of the *same* kingdom under the *same* rule of the *same* Lord.

This it seems to me—on this side of the journey—is the where the transformation will happen. The Samaritans denied Jesus and his disciples hospitality because Jesus' face was set toward Jerusalem. They were offended that Jesus was not coming to bless them as his primary purpose. He had his eyes set on a bigger vision. They felt slighted.

But this is the point. We too, I hope, are traveling to Chituka Village for a larger purpose than to make much of the people there. Our eyes are set on Jerusalem—that is, the fulfillment of God’s vision of the transcendent reality of his Kingdom revealed in the ministry of Jesus Christ. In every thing we do; in every encounter; in our listening and meeting and worshipping, eating, in conversation and silence, we will be listening for the resonances which are signs of God’s presence.

I believe that this will happen. And I am confident that this will happen because when we arrive in Chituka Village we will not be among people who are offended that our faces are set toward Jerusalem. *Why? Because we are joining hearts and hands with sisters and brothers who are on the same journey.* This will be the source of the spiritual power: the joining of sisters and brothers all on the same journey, loved and nourished by the same God that we pray we bring home and share with you.

Needless to say your prayers are essential to the success of this journey. For you too will be setting out to meet people in unfamiliar communities. You will, I hope be challenged to claim your identities as citizens of God’s kingdom. Please be mindful of God’s Spirit being very active here. And should a stranger arrive, receive him or her with the hospitality of one on the same journey. Amen