

Sermon: 2019/06/30 (3rd Sunday after Pentecost, Year C) - 2 Kings 2:1-2,6-14; Psalm 77:1-2,11-20; Galatians 5:1,13-25; & Luke 9:51-62_BTR

Luke, a doctor, and an *enthusiastic* biographer, presents Jesus' ministry in a very orderly and logical manner.

He divides *all* the action into just two, neat halves - like a soccer game.

The first "half" concerns everything that happened in the north; in the Galilee. (The various exorcisms, sermons, etcetera.)

And the second "half" is set in the south, in Judea.

And the fact that, in reality, Jesus wasn't *nearly* so methodical, but quite erratic actually, and travelled up and down the length of the country repeatedly - like a yoyo - is ignored for the sake of appearances; for the sake of a simplified narrative.

And chapter nine - in *Luke* - is the "watershed" that separates the two sections; the fibrous "ligament" or tendon that connects them.

And, as in the body, it is essential to the tale he weaves:

Succinctly, it describes how Jesus was prepared *in the north* for His painful destiny on the Cross *in the south* - which was by the transfiguration - verses 28-36.

And it describes how He arrived at the approximate locale of the Crucifixion in the environs of Jerusalem - which was by a journey through Samaria - the remaining verses.

And whilst He was on that journey, He has this blunt encounter - you might even say curt - with an unnamed 'man' '[on] the road': [v.57].

Notice that the conversation - though it hardly deserves to be called that - is, '[a]s they were going': [v.57].

In motion.

In other words, this stranger - this 'man' - comes "trotting" up alongside Jesus and the Apostles, and *none* of them stop.

They *all* keep walking, and, breathlessly, probably, this chap "opens up" about how he really wants to be a faithful "follower" of Jesus', but - Ah! - there's a "snag," and that's that he has this one little, *rather important* errand to do, which is to 'bury [his] father'.

Who must've *just* died, right?

Like that *very* day or the one *immediately* before:

Because, consider, in an era long, *long* before refrigeration - and in a very hot climate like the Middle East, where this happened - you didn't "muck about" with

dead bodies; rather, you got them into the ground *as fast as possible* before they started to rot and become... odorous.

Think back, of course, to the miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus:

Jesus commands that the stone be removed from the tomb and the sisters Mary and Martha try to stop Him because of - and I quote - '[the] stench': [John 11:39].

It is entirely likely, then, that this 'man' - to approach Jesus the way he did - had literally broken away to speak to Him during the service of burial itself.

Picture that - *modernise the scene in your mind's eye*, if you like:

the mourners, in black, standing at the graveside;

the vicar - *the rabbi* - muttering some comforting words of Scripture;

there's sobbing and people blowing noses into hankies, and then the deceased's

son, sitting front-and-centre, suddenly stands bolt upright, and, without

explanation, sprints away to join a group of strangers who were striding past within sight of the cemetery.

Like he's suddenly suffered a grief-induced "psychotic break."

It's impressive.

The 'man' risks causing gross offence;

he risks criticism and causing gossip and discord and public embarrassment to declare his *future* desire to be a Christian.

It is a pretty bold example worthy of admiration.

So why, then, does Jesus "knock him back"?

(Verbally, speaking.)

Because, you're either in or you're out:

""No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." (Verse. 62.)

What Jesus is after - what God wants - is a *total attitude* of commitment here and *now*.

A *complete* "orientation" toward Him.

This is not about achieving perfect results.

Impeccable conduct - *fully* holy discipleship - would be nice, but is unrealistic.

But what can be asked for and expected is your heart.

Not a bit of it.

Not only on Sundays.

But all.

The 'man's' heart was divided, conflicted;

"divided" between his self-imposed obligation to do the right thing by his dead father, *or* to embark on an exciting new adventure with Christ.

And, essentially, what he was asking of Jesus was for Him to wait rather than the other way around. But this is topsy-turvy.

He - the Son of God - sets the agenda, and *we* follow.

Not the other way around.

And there's no middle ground.
How could there be?
We're either on the same journey or we're not!

We are afforded a clear and helpful example of this in the Old Testament this morning:

Elijah was a roving prophet of God who lived at a very turbulent time when the Kingdom of Israel was *divided* by civil war.

And so, like Jesus (later), he was constantly walking up and down the length of the country - between the two sides - trying to restore peace and sanity.

And with him on this mission was a younger man, Elisha.

And what we see in our text today is that, repeatedly, Elisha was given the opportunity to stay behind, firstly in Gilgal, *and then* in Bethel, and so on: [2 Kgs. 2:1-4].

And there was good reason to "stay behind;" to not persevere:

For Elijah was a very unpopular man.

He irritated the rich and the powerful wherever he went.

But, again and again, Elisha says: "I will not leave you."

And that's the Bible's challenge to us.

Will we walk every difficult, unfashionable step with the Lord, at His side, or we will allow ourselves to fall behind because of half-heartedness?

Discipleship is rewarding.

It is "life, and life in all of its fullness." [John 10:10]

But, as such, it is also daunting.

Intimidating.

And we won't find adequate strength in ourselves.

But that's why we Christians have the Holy Spirit!

Saint Paul reminds us in *Galatians*.

It produces "fruit" in us - it reshapes our character and our inclinations: [5:22f.].

And by so doing re-orientates us to 'love, joy, peace, patience...' *and all those qualities* that mean we *can* accompany our Savior - *in faithfulness* - wherever the road of life leads.

And that's *great* news.

We just need have faith.