

Sermon Notes June 30, 2019

Focus Jesus and the disciples are pretty harsh: burn them all and let the dead bury their dead

Lectionary Readings [http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearC RCL/Pentecost/CProp8 RCL.html](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearC/RCL/Pentecost/CProp8/RCL.html)

Where are we? We are at the beginning of the “travel narrative” - a long section / journey that Jesus takes to Jerusalem. All the greatest hits are in this section: the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son and others (Luke 9:51 to 19:47).

Not Just a death wish Jesus is not going to Jerusalem just to die (although that was a likely outcome). I believe, he went to the center of Jewish religious life to “reimagine the center.” His vision of the Kingdom had Samaritans and prodigals as part of a new Jerusalem. All who got caught up in Jesus’ life and vision would be part of this new center, this new religious experience.

Prophetic Connection Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem. This is an odd phrase, but it captures a prophetic act. **Prophecy is not primarily fortune telling, nor only speaking truth to power**, it is about loyal relationships. A prophet loves deeply and when necessary speaks and acts on behalf of those who need an advocate.

Deeply connected relationships might lead to speaking truth to power, but prophecy is loving and speaking the voice of the voiceless. When a person loves people unconditionally and completely, they will often find themselves in a prophetic role because they can’t stand seeing those they love get hurt.

Here is some context for the “setting his face” comment

- Isaiah 50:7 Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame.
- Ezekiel 21:1 The word of the Lord came to me: 2 Mortal, set your face toward Jerusalem and preach against the sanctuaries; prophesy against the land of Israel

I offer a text from Hebrews which is not a prophetic per se, but it is the result for us of Jesus’ prophetic journey to Jerusalem

- Hebrews 12:3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Single Mindedness The story of disciples wanting to literally burn Samaritans; The story of Jesus weirdly talking about fox holes; The story of Jesus chastising a guy for wanting to bury his father are all pretty pointless for us today, unless we think about the underlying message. The Old Testament story connected to Luke 9 also underlines the point of *single mindedness* (an unwavering focus on the goal).

Elisha left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." Then Elijah said to him, "Go back again; for what have I done to you?" He returned from following him, took the yoke of oxen, and slaughtered them; using the equipment from the oxen, he boiled their flesh, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out and followed Elijah, and became his servant.

The weird BBQ was about letting go of everything that might hinder his prophetic goals, even including his livelihood. Funerals and fox holes can all make sense if we think about Jesus having a single minded focus. He was committed to reimagining faith at the center (Jerusalem). He might get slowed down, but distractions were not going to stop him. He never wavered in making his way to the center.

We can remember his prophetic act in Luke and be single minded too. But first, what are you single minded about? What do you care about so much that not even death or any angry mob can take you off course? I don't have an answer; that is for your to figure out.

I found excerpts from Amy Oden helpful to help us apply the disciples and Jesus's harsh words with a therapeutic spin (workingpreacher.org Amy G. Oden at Saint Paul School of Theology Oklahoma City, OK)

She writes- We've all felt it. The rise in our gut when someone rejects our most cherished beliefs. We recognize the need to justify our views, prove we are right, defend our faith. But we don't stop there. We also have the impulse to attack -- to show how that person is wrong, misguided, even unfaithful. If we have structural or institutional power, we may move to shut them down and "command fire to come down from heaven and consume them" figuratively if not literally...

It's no surprise, then, that James and John seem eager to punish the Samaritans for their refusal to receive Jesus. They appear pretty confident, offering to command fire to come down and consume these knuckleheaded villagers. And certainly, there was precedence (2 Kings 1: 10-12) for calling down fire. Add to that their previous argument about who is the greatest (verse 46), maybe James and John are simply eager to project their own authority.

Cycles of reactivity

These responses will sound familiar to contemporary audiences. In the church and the world, we see similar reactivity to disagreement or perceived slight. It is timely to focus on these few verses (verses 54-56) as Jesus checks the reactive and violent impulses of his committed disciples.

You will know relevant examples from your own context. You will have to resist the very temptation described here, that is, to ascribe these violent tendencies only to those on "the other side." It is easy to see these baser impulses in those whom we already judge as wrong. Instead, help your congregation see the insidious nature of these impulses in ourselves and our own worldview. Otherwise, the finger-pointing will continue.

Triumphalism

Triumphalism is a powerful and dangerous drug, closely tied to self-righteousness. It feels so good to be right! To win! To know that God is on our side! Yay us! Boo everyone else! Endorphins pump through our bodies, creating a high we want to sustain.

Next Jesus details further demands upon his followers. When his disciples want to finger-point, Jesus instead requires them to examine their own life commitments, calling all who follow him to order their priorities so that their lives are radically free to follow him (verses 57-62).

The Pivot

When we are tempted to focus on how right we are and how wrong others are, pause and pay attention to this impulse as a red flag. The impulse to attack tells us that, according to Jesus, we must do a full 180-degree pivot, turning our gaze from "the other" to examining ourselves instead. We must ask: To what am I attached today that keeps me from following Jesus fully and freely?

I think she offers an applied understanding of single mindedness and healthy relationships that we can all work toward **Todd**