

Sermon Seeds for June 30, 2019
3rd Sunday after Pentecost, Year C.
Gospel Text: Luke 9:51-62

What's wrong with goodbye?

Today's text from the gospel according to Luke sounds unnecessarily harsh. Jesus, in a series of rebukes, tells two unnamed people to avoid doing what we believe is the right thing to do. One is living through the death of their father and they made plans to bury him. Instead of running away from their grief, they chose to face it. They are utilizing their culture's burial rituals to help them cope with their new reality. The loss of a father can force us to live into our new normal. The one speaking to Jesus wants to discover what this all means. And Jesus, unexpectedly, said "no."

Another person promises Jesus that they will follow him. However, they want to say goodbye to their household first. This person seems to understand that following Jesus will require them to do new things. They recognize, I think, what Jesus is already doing. At the start of this passage, Jesus turned his face towards Jerusalem. His ministry will no longer be circling around the place God promised to dwell (the Temple in Jerusalem). Jesus' ministry in Luke began in the borderlands, in the place where the boundary between gentile (i.e. someone who is not Jewish) and Jewish was blurred and mixed. He ate meals with gentiles, visited non-Jewish communities, and was affirmed as the Messiah (Luke 9:18-23) while in front of a temple dedicated to the Roman Emperor. Now, with an almost laser like focus, Jesus turned his face towards Jerusalem. The unnamed person at the end of our text gets this. We hear in their voice an acknowledgment that their life is about to change. They want to honor that change by taking a short trip back home to tell everyone goodbye. They earnestly seem like they want to close one chapter of their life and accept the start of something new. Their desire to say goodbye seems like a reasonable thing to do. And Jesus still said "no."

So what do we do with this unreasonable Jesus? First, we should acknowledge exactly what we're feeling. It's okay, natural, and expected for Jesus to get under our skin. Second, we need to put Jesus' words into context. Luke tied these conversations together for a reason. We cannot understand Jesus' words to these two unnamed people without also looking at Jesus' response to James and John. Jesus' turn towards Jerusalem put him at odds with the expectations of the Samaritans. A village of Samaritans refused to receive Jesus and this upset James

and John. They took the Samaritans response as a personal rebuke on their own beliefs. They then decided to see if they could inflict incredible violence on that community. These two followers of the Messiah even asked for Jesus' permission. The religious disagreement between the Samaritans and the Jewish community was old and fierce. The Samaritans' refusal was not unexpected. But James and John refused to say goodbye to their hurt. And when they were challenged, their first response was to attack. Jesus then told them, "No."

One of the themes throughout these conversations in our text from Luke is about re-orientation. We are, through our baptism, wrapped up in the life and experience of Christ. We are called to put aside the unexamined impulses that encourage us to say the wrong kind of goodbye. A goodbye that refuses to embrace our new identity in Christ is a goodbye that keeps us tied to whatever holds us back. We are called to examine the ways we tie ourselves to impulses and ways of living that encourage us to acts of violence. Jesus' turn towards Jerusalem is a move that will lead him to the Cross. It's there when his arms will be literally stretched wide, open to all. The openness of Christ must be our openness too. What impulse, belief or system of oppression and injustice, is causing you to be like James and John? And how can you, through Christ, say goodbye to the ways you hold God's love back?

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