

Luke 9:51-62

9:51 When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

9:52 And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to prepare for his arrival,

9:53 but they did not receive him because his face was set toward Jerusalem.

9:54 When his disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"

9:55 But he turned and rebuked them.

9:56 Then they went on to another village.

9:57 As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."

9:58 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

9:59 To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

9:60 And Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

9:61 Another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home."

9:62 And Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Sermon: My God is So Big

There's an old song, one you may have learned in Vacation Bible School: "My God is SO big, SO strong and SO mighty, there's nothing my God cannot do."

And that song kept running through my head as I read this morning's pericope. It seems to me that the message of this little song is accurate, but too often the application of its message is found wanting.

My God is so big, so strong and so mighty. There's nothing my God cannot do. *As long as it's in the right place.*

In Luke's gospel, when Jesus makes his way from the Galilee to Jerusalem, he decides to go through Samaria. It's a direct route, but it's certainly not the most popular one. Samaria was the capital of Israel, the Northern Kingdom, the one that got sacked by Assyria, and lost its identity two centuries before its neighbors to the south. Samaritans worshiped God on one mountain, while folks in Judea worshiped God on another. Same God, different places and spaces. And those different spaces and places made for significant tension.

It's not that the Samaritans weren't hoping for a Messiah. They were. And it's not that they objected to the teachings of Jesus. They liked what he had to say. It's that Jesus was heading for Jerusalem. For the

Samaritans, the very idea that God's new beginning would happen on less-than-sacred soil was a disqualifier. Of course, that sentiment wasn't unique to Samaritans. Jesus' own congregation in Nazareth was mighty proud, and mighty excited to hear him proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. That is until he told them that Nazareth would not be the corporate headquarters for such a catalyst. And just how eager do you imagine the disciples would have been to hear their teacher's message if Jesus had told them that Samaria, rather than Jerusalem, would be their final destination? Not very, I'm guessing.

God's inbreaking realm is not contingent on geography, no matter how much we humans want it to be.

Our God is SO creative, left-handed even, SO big and SO clever, there's no place She cannot go, there's no person She cannot find.

My God is so big, so strong and so mighty. There's nothing my God cannot do. *As long as you aren't expecting empathy and humility.*

The disciples went to Samaria first. They'd called the local newspaper, recruited like-minded folks to fill the local civic center, and they even had their agents ready so folks could give their loyalty oaths. And when those Samaritans spurned their teacher, they said, "You are gonna get it now. Let's get biblical, Jesus. We've got Samuel L. Jackson and John Travolta ready to reenact *Pulp Fiction*. They're in those cool black suits, and they've worked up an Old Testament-style monologue, just before we rain down a little fire and vengeance."

"That's not how we do things," says Jesus, before giving his disciples a brief lesson on the pitfalls of systemic injustice. "We'll go on to the next

town, and don't worry, they've heard what they need to hear, even if they aren't yet ready to hear it."

My God isn't just my God, They're yours, too. They are so big, and so strong and so mighty, and They don't spend Their time seeking to prove it. My God knows that power is not domination, nor is it coercion, nor is it assimilation.

The very people in Samaria who are unable to hear Jesus today, will be some of the most fervent supporters in the Acts church. Not because God has rained down fire and brimstone, but because God has showered them with love. And because God's Spirit is not fleeting. The opportunity to experience the presence of God isn't some chance encounter. Jesus may leave town, but the invitation to be part of the beloved community never expires. Even for people who worship God on a different mountain.

My God is so big, so strong, and so mighty. There's nothing my God cannot do. *But don't ask me to move. And can I settle my affairs? And can I say a quick goodbye to my loved ones?*

In Caesar's world, and in President Trump's world, and even in the person who will eventually replace President Trump, we have, we do, and we will base our so-called security on our geography, and on our connections, and on our wealth, and most of all, on our status markers relative to our neighbors. Jesus is asked three questions by earnest people seeking to be neophytes of his new philosophy.

One is ready to follow Jesus, he just wants to know what kind of per diem this new gig is gonna have, and where he'll sleep and eat. Another is ready to follow Jesus, just as soon as he can close up his daddy's

estate, and secure the family's land for another generation. Still another just wants to make sure he can say a clean goodbye to his dearest ones.

And Jesus says, "We don't have time for all this. I'm like Roger Miller – I'm a man of means, but by no means, King of the Road. Don't look back, look forward to what's coming. That means quit worrying about estates and connections and works that are not life-giving."

Now I don't believe that Jesus is being literal in his commands. I don't believe Jesus expects us to go hungry or without shelter, or to disregard our obligations, or to eliminate our social network or family connections. I believe Jesus is using hyperbole to emphasize the urgency that comes with discipleship. Following Jesus, despite what those preaching the prosperity gospel might tell us, does not guarantee our wealth, nor will it secure us a prominent cabinet position. What Gospel does do is invite us, no matter who we are, into caring community. And when we connect and belong to a place where our value begins and ends as children of God, we are not beholden to zip codes, nor inheritances, nor last names. Rather, the love and empathy we feel for those closest to us, also become evident in relationships with peers, strangers, and even enemies. And the urgency is in seeking such goodness, because if we are missing out on all that goodness, we are missing out on the fullness God intends for our lives.

My God is so big, so strong and so mighty, there's nothing my God cannot do. And if that's true, it means my God, your God, OUR God, has the power to help us see past the little things that keep causing big, big problems in our lives.

I believe today's passage reveals two things: 1) The God we worship is not one who follows traditional expectations. 2) The God we follow requires a discipleship that transcends traditional thinking.

You know why our God is SO big? Because our God doesn't have an ego that makes Him/Her/They little in the face of our doubt or our anger. Instead, our God is empathetic to the human experience, so much so, that God's empathy is born out in the life of Jesus.

And do you want to know why Christian discipleship (or Jesus-following if that term makes you more comfortable) appears difficult? It's because we're asked to trade in an economy of wealth for an economy of love. And that's an economy that can make us vulnerable, because it's not inundated with artificial and manufactured measurements. The love of God doesn't increase like a home value or stock; it can't be bartered like a commodity; and it doesn't provide seniority. The love of God provides enough, no matter how hard we want to make it provide enough-er.

So...Jesus heads straight into the teeth of Jerusalem, stopping in all the places where he doesn't poll well. And for all those who follow, Jesus asks us to faith it. Faith that God's got us.

Millbrook Baptist Church, I'm not advocating for you to take a vow of poverty, or to quit paying your bills, or to give the church all the proceeds from your mom's estate. You don't have to do that to be a disciple, however, neither the finance committee nor myself object if you feel called to give a significant financial gift.

I do, however, want us to think about all those little things that are preventing us from looking forward. And I want us to ask ourselves, do such pursuits enhance discipleship, or delay it?

After all, if our God is SO big, and SO strong, and SO mighty, and there's nothing They cannot do, what do you reckon He or She could do with our hands, our hearts, our voices, our ears, our eyes, and our spirits, if they were all looking forward rather than backward?

I don't about you, but I'd sure like to find out. And I have pretty good hunch, that it would mean a better world, no matter the Caesar who claims to control it.

May it be so. And may it be soon. Amen.