

Third Sunday after Pentecost  
1 Kings 19:16-16,19-21  
Psalm 16  
Galatians 5:1,13-25  
Luke 9:51-62

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Grace and peace to you all from God our strength and our redeemer - Amen.

In many ways, I like to imagine I am in control of my life.

I like to plan out my day. I feel accomplished when I check things off my to do list. I like to have an itinerary and plan when I go on vacation. I am goal oriented and I appreciate when things can be simply explained so everyone knows what's going on. Some have even told me I have a "Type A" personality from time to time. But, when it comes down to it, the truth is that I am not in control of my life.

Whether it is the ebb and flow of my week, the rate of return on my investments, the health of my family, or the state of the world in which I live. There is actually very little I can and do have complete control over.

Which is a difficult realization that eventually dawns on us all - but it is also the unsettling understanding we come to encounter at the heart of our gospel lesson.

And maybe, in part, the struggle to come to terms with the idea we might have to surrender our sense of control to God also explains some of the reactions Jesus receives as he sets his sights towards Jerusalem and the cross.

If we break Saint Luke's narrative down, we come to realize that it's not only us that come to struggle with control - it's also the Samaritan's Jesus disciples encounter, his beloved followers James and John, and those who meet Jesus along his travels through the local villages.

The first hint we hear of this comes from the Samaritans. As Saint Luke tells us - the Samaritans were able to recognized that Jesus had already set his face to Jerusalem and so they were not interested in welcoming him. Back then to "set ones face" to something was a commonly used Hebrew phrase to expressed a committed purpose one held - and it was clear to the Samaritans that if Jesus had set his sights on Jerusalem - they would not be following him there.

While the gospel doesn't really tell us the reason the Samaritans turned Jesus offer down - we can assume that from their own discomfort of being seen culturally as the proverbial outsiders - they didn't have much hope that this Jesus guy would come through for them if he already had his slights set on the next town. And who could

blame them. It's hard to trust your neighbours if they have never truly shown any interest in your language or culture except to use you as the butt of their jokes. So perhaps it's not surprising that Jesus simply moves on - accepting the Samaritans decision while being ready to go to the next village to spread the gospel.

However, what is surprising is James and John's overreaction to this rejection. In fact, it's a little more than surprising - its down right disturbing as we hear them ask Jesus to let them call down holy fire from heaven to devour the Samaritans. This isn't simply a tongue and cheek call for neighbourly retribution - it's a genocidal call for the end of all who would come to stand against Christ's message and the disciples role in sharing it.

And Jesus swiftly and rightly rebukes them - because that is not what the mission of God is about. It's not about threatening ultimatums or self righteous speeches. The disciples appear to have forgotten in the midst of this moment that God's kingdom is about being open to the invitation to enter into a life-giving relationship with God and God's people.

And as the story goes on we hear that some people in the villages have heard this invitation from Jesus and they are making plans to follow Him. They just need some time before they can make good on their word to become full time followers of Christ. One needs to bury his father while another wishes make their appropriate farewells. And who can blame them? These seem like completely reasonable requests.

After all, in our first reading from First Kings, Elisha is called to take part in the prophetic ministry of God - and he asks and receives time to go home from Elijah to say his goodbyes, and wrap up his affairs to fully commit to this life of ministry. And when he returns home he throws a spectacular party, he kills the family oxen to put on a fantastic neighbourhood feast, he gives away his possessions, and finally burns his farming equipment so that he won't be tempted to return to the life he once had.

Yet, when it comes to the case of our gospel lesson today - Jesus expects these villages to drop all their plans and follow him immediately – no matter what is going on. To me it just seems like a heartless request for Jesus to make based on what he has just heard. And while the gospel doesn't share the villager's response with us, I think they might be something like my own if I was asked to do the same thing:

"I'm sorry Jesus, but you are wrong. Sometimes we have to bury our dead. Sometimes we have to say goodbye to those we are leaving behind or to those we have lost. Sometimes we have a few things that need tending before we can jump into this discipleship thing with two feet. Sometimes we just need some time."

But maybe, I shouldn't be so quick to assume that Jesus is being insensitive in this moment. Maybe Jesus knows a little more about our humanness, or our need to find and control our own way forward in this messy world than he tends to say.

Maybe, what Jesus wants me to do - wants us to do - is leave the need to always be in full control behind. To try to be at peace with what has happened, to accept what we have done, and to acknowledge the ways we wish things might have been different, before moving forward with God.

Maybe, just maybe, what Jesus, what God is trying to say to us in this Gospel is that there is still work to be done, there is still life to live, there are still opportunities and experiences and memories to be had—that dwelling where we are – may mean we are dwelling with something that is no longer life-giving and that maybe, just maybe, God invites us to new-life because that is what the kingdom is all about.

Because in the end we know that we really *aren't* in control, and that an unexpended illness, or loss, or tragedy, or any one of a hundred other things may dash our hopes as well as our plans, leaving us to wonder what comes next.

And it would be tempting to simply say that in these moments, we need to turn our lives and control over to Christ who will simply make everything all right.

But as appealing as that might sound to proclaim, I'm not sure that the passage in front of us invites the choice between us being in control or Jesus being in control and everything being alright.

As theologian David shared in his commentary this week: "Jesus doesn't go to Jerusalem to assume [control] or take charge...he goes to Jerusalem to throw himself fully and completely into our out-of-control lives and comes out the other side with us in death and in new life.

So perhaps that's the promise of this Gospel – not that we or Christ have to be in full control of our lives, but rather that God in Jesus joins us in our out-of-control moments, holding onto us, bringing us by his side saying I see you, I am with you, I love you, nothing will change that you are mine. Walk with me for a while."

And that is something we can stake our lives and our hope on a thousand times over throughout our lives - Amen.