

Karen Hollis
June 30, 2019
Luke 9:51-62

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be reflections of your word to us in Christ Jesus.

Sermon:

Summertime in the western world is for travel. Not that we don't travel at other times, but we don't hesitate to take advantage of the warm weather to stretch our wings a bit. Some of us have already been on holidays, while others of us still have plans for later on in the summer. It doesn't come as a surprise then that for Christians, summertime has historically been the time for pilgrimage, where the faithful people of God leave the familiar and set off on an intentional journey to encounter the holy. Common pilgrimages are to places like the Isle of Iona in Scotland or along El Camino de Santiago de Compostela (the Way of St. James, ending in Santiago, Spain). But even Christians didn't invent the idea. In Jesus' day devout Jews from Judea, the area surrounding Jerusalem would take 3 pilgrimages to the holy city every year for particular festivals, including the Passover. When Jesus sets his face for Jerusalem, he is aiming to be there for that particular festival, but he doesn't exactly take a direct route.

Traveling in general was unusual in those days. We've talked about what life was like for the average person. They are beyond poor; their family and neighbours are beyond poor; there are no margins to their life, so things like leisure and travel wouldn't have even occurred to them. Other than those who have taken the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the disciples wouldn't have traveled too far beyond their villages. Here comes Jesus with a traveling ministry. Jesus leads them on a new kind of pilgrimage; yes, they are going to Jerusalem, but scholars say that trying to follow their route leaves one scratching one's head. Do you remember the cartoon Family Circus? The mom would ask Billy to come in for dinner and you see his path looping all over the yard, in and out and under things until he finally goes in the back door. Following Jesus' route to Jerusalem is a little like that. He's not taking the straight path; he travels all over Samaria and Judea for the next 9 chapters of Luke, before his triumphal entry into

Jerusalem. But his face is set toward Jerusalem in the sense that his mind, heart and spirit are in alignment and focused on what is before him. He does ministry along the way, and is building toward Jerusalem. Jesus expects those traveling with him to also be aligned with his purpose. For his followers and would-be followers, this is a challenging task. Becoming aligned with Jesus means being faced with ourselves. When I went to Iona over 10 years ago, I got to know the Warden's spouse, Simon, who described the island as a place where our personal stuff bubbles up; it's a place where the parts of ourselves we struggle with the most raise their ugly heads. Pilgrimage with Jesus is not for the faint of heart: it's an enormous personal challenge with extraordinary encounters with the holy.

In this morning's story, those traveling with Jesus are faced with their own anger at the village who was not willing to receive them. They ask, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" In the spirit of Elijah. Jesus says no and keeps walking, leaving them to reconcile their feelings.

Jesus seems to have a challenging word for anyone along the way who wants to come and follow. He tells those who are eager to join him, this is not a road of certainty and comfort; to those who have to wrap up life at home he asserts that this road requires a full and immediate commitment; it is the road on which those who lose their lives for Jesus' sake will find it.

A lot happens along this road with Jesus; it's not simply a walk from town to town, with Jerusalem always in view. It's a walk inside of ourselves, where our ego meets our soul. It's the place where the stuff of life meets the sacred call on our lives.

A pilgrimage is an incredible tool for engaging the self along the way of Christ. Over the millennia humans have also developed a way of taking this journey in a much more local ritual we know as the labyrinth. Humans have found in the labyrinth a container for pilgrimage, for journeys of faith, for prayer, for a way toward wholeness. The labyrinth is not a maze; there is only one way in and one way out, so with the assurance that one will not get lost, one can then follow the path, focus on the journey.

Instructions:

Space 1: As we move into Open Space, if you would like to work with the labyrinth, you can get one from the sound booth, tracing your finger along the path in 3 movements is a nice option: 1. Moving toward the centre is releasing, letting go, quieting the mind and opening the heart. 2. At the centre open yourself to God, remain there to pray and receive. 3. Going out or returning, follow the same path – stay in tune with what you received at the centre and take it into the world with you. Perhaps you come to the labyrinth ready to journey with Jesus; or you come with something on your heart today; maybe you want to bring with you one of the questions at the back. It's your choice and you're your time.

Space 2: Reflection Questions

1. Even though the road is challenging, the disciples continue to follow Jesus because Jesus is the source of life. How is your journey with Jesus giving you life today?
2. There are several along the road who have excuses about why they can't drop everything and follow Jesus. What is your favourite distraction from walking the road with Jesus? What keeps you from walking the road of discipleship more fully?
3. When the village refuses to receive Jesus, the disciples ask if Jesus wants them to bring fire down on the people. The rejection closes them off to generosity and they respond with anger. What is your initial response to rejection? Do you have a different response after taking time to reflect?
4. Jesus offers a word of challenge to those who want to join him on the road. What is Jesus' word of challenge to you today?

Space 3: Light a candle by the communion table

Space 4: Anointing for Healing with minister on the chancel

Space 5: You're welcome to remain in your seat and pray/reflect.