

Travelling Together- Pentecost 3c 2022

By Rev. Jenny for St. James

Travelling is a theme in several of our readings today. Elijah and Elisha are journeying to the spot where Elijah will be taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, we are told. Elisha shows the depth of his friendship with Elijah by refusing to stay behind and stays with Elijah for the entire journey. He is rewarded with a vision of Elijah ascending in a chariot of fire drawn by horses of fire and then is gifted a double portion of Spirit.

In our Gospel, Jesus and his disciples are heading towards Jerusalem on the most direct route possible. Most Jewish people would bypass Samaria because there is a centuries old animosity between Jews and Samaritans. This lives up to expectations when Jesus enters the village and is shunned. In good old fashioned road rage, James and John volunteer to “command fire to come down from heaven and consume” the offenders. Being the patient, loving man, Jesus is, he just leaves and goes elsewhere.

These two very different journeys evoke images of several events from this past short while. We have gathered and walked with the families as the lives of Ron Bailey, Jack Brooks and Larry Hossack have been celebrated and today we put to rest Jean King. Being a church community carries the privilege of travelling through life with other members. We become like family, sharing life’s ups and downs along the way. Just like Elisha going the distance with Elijah, we go the distance with each other, right to holding the service to honour their lives. Chariots of fire rarely come into play, but we are always blessed through knowing each other. We too mourn their loss just as Elisha did, although we probably do not tear our clothes. We might feel like doing it though as an outward expression of our loss.

Some die having been a huge part of the parish while others die before we have the opportunity to know them. Some have watched the goings on from the sidelines, feeling connected from a distance. Some have been involved in St James from baptism to death. But everyone who asks is celebrated from St James. We are all members of God’s community.

Now Jesus and his disciples were not so warmly welcomed by the Samaritans, were they? The Samaritans help on to deep grudges and refused to be part of God’s wider community. And they lost out on having a personal encounter with Jesus, a very real loss. But, Jesus didn’t reprimand them or try to force them to see who was standing in their presence. He just left to go where he would be more warmly received.

But the disciples took real offence to this shunning. They got angry. So angry actually that they wanted to call down fire from heaven and have the people burnt up.

As I read this, I thought of my trip driving to Brampton and back this week. It was a hot day, and I was blessed to have an airconditioned car. But not everyone is so blessed. And traffic was slow as we entered Toronto due to the seeming endless construction occurring there.

I am a safe driver and am familiar with most of the route I took. I stayed aware of the traffic around me and would move over a lane to let fast cars by. But sometimes I couldn’t move over

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fast enough for the drivers coming up behind me. And I was blessed with seeing some very definite signs of frustration and anger aimed at me. I believe that if those drivers could call down fire from heaven, I might not be here today!

I didn't spot any fire, but I did see a few cars off to the side of the road with the police and some with ambulances and tow trucks. Road rage does not pay either in the time of the disciples or our time.

Just like the people who approach Jesus and wish to follow Him, we too can have many reasons why we are too busy right now.

"I will drive slower but right now I am running late."

"I don't like following others on the road. I would rather lead."

"If I don't speed up, I will be stuck behind a transport truck."

"I would volunteer to help at church, but I am busy."

"I would go to church but I don't like the minister."

"I would spend time with that lonely parishioner, but they may ask me to do too much."

The possible excuses are as varied as we are. Jesus is showing us that we are called to put those other things aside and prioritize following Jesus. We are given the example of Elisha as how to be a true friend and follower of God. We need to nurture relationships with each other and maintain them until it is no longer possible. Even when the way gets long or difficult.

But even Jesus did not force Himself on others. Those who wish to build relationship will be gifted in double measure. Those who have been part of a congregation long term know the value it brings; just as long-term friendships bring many rewards. It is heart-warming to see parishioners taking time out of their busy schedules to assist others in the parish, from bringing soup when one has a cold to gathering to bury one who has passed.

Model the behavior of Jesus, Elisha, and Elijah. Stay connected. Nurture relationships with fellow Christians. Be part of this church community. Go the distance. Prioritize your relationship with God and follow God's lessons.

But also, avoid getting angry, especially at things you can't control. Don't waste time on people who so not want a relationship with you but move on and don't look back.

We continue to bury our dead, but we remember that our priority is the living. It is those who are left behind who need our support. It is those who are lost who need bringing back to the community. It is those who are lonely who need our company.

St. James is built on the strength of those who have gone before and will continue with the strength of those who remain and are to come. Together, we follow Jesus wherever He will go. Thanks be to God.