

1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21

Luke 9:51-62

Galatians 5:1,13-25

“You will show us the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy.” AMEN!

In a conversation with a pastor the other day,
we were talking about counseling couples
before marriage.

They said that one question they always ask
the couple planning to be married is
“who will take out the trash?” :-)

We laughed at the question,
but it’s a good one, right?

Not because it is supposed to
be one person’s job, but to think of it
in the broader context about
responsibilities and commitments.

Succeeding or failing in one’s responsibilities
can potentially hurt or strengthen the relationship.

It made me begin to think about my commitments
and the people’s commitments around me

because we all know what it means
to live life by excuse, right?

It reminds me of the old saying...

“Excuses, everyone has one and they all stink.” :-)

Well, I cleaned the saying up a bit.

“The dog ate my homework.”

“My alarm didn’t go off.”

Colleen has heard of myriad of my excuses
for doing or not doing this or that and
I’ve heard some of hers.

We all know excuses and
we all use them to explain
the ways we behave.

A survey was done once that
asked business executives what excuses
they heard the most.

Number one was “It’s not my fault.”

And a close second was
“It was someone else’s fault.”

I would have been interested to hear what
excuses the executives used to defend
astounding bonuses and luxurious purchases,
too, but that survey didn’t get done! :-)

“Excuses, everyone has one and they all stink.” (Pause)

Today, is about commitment and excuses in our gospel,

a pinch of judgment, and a cup of temperamental comments.

The first commitment we recognize is Jesus’.

Where in the opening paragraph of our gospel this morning we heard twice that Jesus’ “face is set to go to Jerusalem.”

The idiom: Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem, means to communicate an important commitment.

A commitment to what we all know happened in Jerusalem.

Jesus had already told his followers twice what would happen in Jerusalem.

Betrayal, suffering, death and resurrection would occur there and they were prophecies that none of them understood and were afraid to ask further

questions about it.

This point in Luke is a pivotal moment for Jesus
and the next ten chapters (10 chapters!)
are about the journey to Jerusalem, and
the things that happened on the way.

So here we are, the first stop
on the way to Jerusalem, was
to sleep over in a Samaritan town.

So ,Jesus sent a few ahead
to announce their arrival,
but the town rejected Jesus.

They closed the city gate;
denied his sleep over request.

That might seem surprising to us because it
was an important part of the Middle East culture
to welcome travelers and strangers,

but we are also familiar with such
closed door tribalism between
Jews and Samaritans.

We know closed door tribalism
because we live in it today.

You see, the Jewish religious authorities didn't
like that Samaritans worshipped
God in other places.

They believed God worship had
to occur in Jerusalem... in the temple.

We'd side with Samaritans here, I think.

We know that God can be praised
anywhere and everywhere.

Yet, the people in the Samaritan town saw Jesus'
face set toward Jerusalem and assumed
he was a temple worship zealot.

The "Jerusalem bound Jesus" they assumed
was one of them from the temple authority!

So he was not welcomed among them and
this is the part where we get a pinch of judgment;
the townspeople towards Jesus and from

James and John when they ask Jesus if
he wanted them
to unleash some God judgment on them
for not following the rules of hospitality.

Thankfully, Jesus' calmer head prevailed and

so they went on to another village.

Maybe even another Samaritan village?

We don't know, but I like to think that
in the same way people are not all uniform
then neither are towns or communities.

What is important to remember, here is
that even though Jesus was committed
and focused on getting to Jerusalem,

he was not going to neglect, ignore, or
otherwise harm people he'd encounter on
the way even if they rejected him.

We can assume there were mixed emotions
as the group moved on to the next town.

Rejection never feels good and when it happens
it is easy to let our emotions get away from us
and react in hurtful ways.

This truth, that rejection hurts and
we can lose control of our emotions,

makes the next part of the gospel
very interesting because a jolt is delivered

here when a few would-be followers
come up to Jesus.

And we find that Jesus' calmer head
takes more of a temperamental tone, now. (Pause)

Why did Jesus set the bar of discipleship so high?

Still, we can relate to this passage and
what it might mean to our lives when we talk
about following Jesus.

Following this Jesus meant that one
became a traveler without a home,
no place to rest in or a place
to gather possessions.

Following Jesus meant leaving family,
friends and familiar faces and it meant
neglecting the things
one might have regarded
as important responsibilities...

like burying the dead or saying
good-bye to loved ones.

Things that are quite important to us.

So, we need to contend with this

presentation of Jesus for a moment... or longer! :-)

Jesus, in all this complexity and temperament
makes him not easily categorized by us.

Here, Christian faithfulness, identity,
and calling sound terrifying.

Last week, Jesus sent home the
healed Gerazene demoniac, so that he
could proclaim all God did to his townsfolk.

After today's reading, it sounds like a much
better gig than going with Jesus!

AMEN!?! (Pause)

Yet, such is the way when a holy God
wants to get involved with
everyday human beings.

Instead of explaining or defending Jesus,
we will avoid the urge to soften his words.

Who am I to apologize for him?

It is better to let them sink in as
we are reminded that Jesus, and
human encounters with him,

were (and are) enigmatic and ambiguous.

Meaning that Jesus was, and is,
often difficult to understand and the things
he said and did are open to more
than one interpretation.

No one but Christ could be
a fierce apocalyptic prophet,
a wise philosophical teacher, a divine
healer and feeder of multitudes,

AND the One who was able to meet
the high bar of sacrificing his own life in order
to teach us about God.

Jesus oscillates between
“comforting and catastrophic.”

God, in multidimensional form.

Human beings want to flatten God out,
but Jesus won't allow it. (Pause)

As we go back to the journey with
Jesus as his face set toward Jerusalem...

You can imagine the other disciples
watching Jesus turn away potential followers and

wonder what they were thinking.

More the merrier! Fill the pews, Jesus!

I'd have been the first to tug on Jesus' sleeve and
give him advice about the benefit of
more bodies on the journey.

But, then again, maybe I'd have been one of
the three that made excuses to not follow him.

One thing's for sure, God's reality
continues to clash with the world's reality,
especially when we identify

following Jesus as a singular or right way to believe.

Jesus won't allow human beings
to flatten out God.

Instead, Christ calls people to newness
and to commitment.

A newness and commitment that is
embodied by Jesus.

You see, following Jesus can look
very different from one person to the next.

Your goal, my goal, and their goal is
to follow the way Jesus calls and
let God be the multi-dimensional
Lord of all.

AMEN!