

1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21

Psalm 16

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Luke 9:51-62

Sermon June 30th, 2019

God Shows Us the Path of Life! Then Helps Us Walk Down It!

In our Psalm this morning, the Psalmist declares to us, “God shows us the path of life.” We see this declaration being fulfilled through Jesus’ words and deeds during his ministry. Jesus is sent to show us the path of life. And also, to invite us to follow Jesus down this path of life.

Now, at first glance, this doesn’t seem too difficult. Just do what Jesus does and we will be walking along side Jesus down the path of life. Experiencing all that God has to offer. Peace, love, justice, forgiveness, healing, reconciliation, and new life.

Then we turn to our gospel this morning, and hear just how hard it is to follow Jesus. First, we hear about the Samaritans Jesus has encountered, and see that they are deeply challenged by what Jesus has to say. One reason may be that they are still angry at those within Jesus’ faith tradition, because many have looked with disdain upon the Samaritan people. Another reason may be that the Samaritans beliefs and values are so different from the Jewish people that they can’t seem to find common ground. So, the Samaritan people’s hearts and ears are closed to Jesus. At least for the moment.

Then when Jesus is on his way to another village he encounters three different people who are eager to follow Jesus. They see something special in Jesus. They are excited about Jesus’ message about God’s peace, love, justice, forgiveness, healing, reconciliation, and new life. They want to follow Jesus, but like the people in the village they find out just how hard following Jesus is going to be.

For example, the first person realizes that to follow Jesus means life may be somewhat unstable as one is unable to settle in one place. This person also will become vulnerable to the hospitality of others. As Jesus relies on the hospitality of others. Or in other words following Jesus means to be dependent on God and our neighbor to provide. Easier said than done.

The second person Jesus encounters wants to follow Jesus, but needs to take care of his family obligations first. Jesus challenges him by saying the dead will bury themselves. So, following Jesus comes with a dedication that sometimes challenges us to sacrifice things in our lives that may be very hard to sacrifice.

The third person Jesus encounters wants to follow Jesus, but wants to say goodbye first to those he loves. Now Jesus may come off harsh by challenging this person for wanting to do this, but what I believe Jesus is challenging this person to do is to stop looking back. One cannot embrace the changes that Jesus is proposing by holding on to what was.

So, all three people want to follow Jesus. They are passionate about what Jesus is teaching and promising, but find that the path Jesus is walking is going to be hard to walk down. It is going to challenge what they know and what they have become comfortable living with.

We can relate to these three people. We have all gathered here this Sunday, because we believe in Jesus' words. We are passionate about Jesus' mission for the world. Of course, we would love to live in a world where we experience peace, love, justice, forgiveness, healing, reconciliation, and new life.

Yet, we face similar challenges as the early followers of Jesus. Like the Samaritans, sometimes Jesus' message challenges our beliefs and values making it hard for us to listen. Maybe we too find ourselves sending Jesus away or at least some of what he says, because the sacrifices, the cost of living that way is too much.

Like the first person, we want to follow Jesus wherever Jesus goes, but realize how hard it is to stay focused on God and God's ministry all the time. Life gets in the way. We are surrounded by people who need us. We are overwhelmed by our to do lists. We wrestle with taking out our bibles and reading them. We wrestle with getting to church every week. We wrestle with finding a quiet place to pray. We struggle to keep up with Jesus. Sometimes, we find ourselves drifting away from Jesus' message when we are unable to keep up with those things that keep us connected to Jesus. Keep us connected to God.

And also, in a world where we are taught to take care of ourselves, it is hard to live a life where we depend on God and others. To become vulnerable. To trust.

Like the second person, we find ourselves wanting to jump in and dedicate our lives to Jesus, but at the same time, not neglect our family obligations. Sometimes we find ourselves having to choose between gathering with our faith community and gathering with family and friends. Sometimes, the pressures we face in nurturing our relationships get in the way of nurturing our relationship with God. It's not easy living up to Jesus' challenge.

Like the third person, we sometimes struggle to move forward. To try new things. Jesus is offering a fresh perspective. A new way. And yet we find ourselves often lamenting what was.

It isn't easy to pick up our crosses and follow Jesus. To dedicate every part of our lives to Jesus.

We could read this section of the gospel and get really discouraged. However, hearing this story in a wider context helps us see that Jesus challenges us to live this way, but also understands that it isn't going to be easy. Jesus offers us grace to lift us back up again. Jesus' helps us walk down this path of life.

At the beginning of our gospel this morning, when Jesus is rejected by the Samaritans the disciples are fuming, and want to curse them. Yet, Jesus rebukes the disciples. Jesus knows all the context that explains why the Samaritans are struggling with his words. Jesus isn't going to force his way into their hearts. Jesus is patient. Jesus chooses to leave.

Now we can read this as meaning Jesus has given up on the Samaritans. But, we hear later that this is not the case. In the book of Acts, we hear in Jesus' last words that the disciples will be called to share the good news beyond the walls of Jerusalem, to all of Samaria. Jesus shows us grace and patience when we struggle to hear his words or live out his actions.

In our reading of first Kings we hear Elisha's call to be a prophet. Elijah like Jesus asks Elisha to come and follow. But, before Elisha leaves he has to finish what he is doing. Elijah allows time for him to do what he needs to do. So, not everywhere does God hold us to God's timeline. I think God is more flexible than we give God credit for.

In Paul's writing to the church in Galatia, we see that we have been given the Spirit. And even though our desires, our worldly needs, get in the way of us living out our calling as followers of Christ. We have been given the Spirit. Jesus' way of helping us continue to do the ministry of Jesus. Continue to preach and act out God's peace, love, justice, forgiveness, healing, reconciliation, and new life in the world.

Yes, we will not always be perfect at it. We will sometimes stumble pretty hard. But, knowing that God is there to lift us back up. Knowing that God is walking with us as we try to walk down the path of life, gives us the faith and strength we need to keep trying. To live our lives following Jesus.

Let us pray, loving God, we give thanks that you show us the path of life. We give thanks that you send your Son to show us how to walk down this path of life. We give thanks for your Spirit that grabs our hand and walks with us down this path of life. In Jesus name we pray, **Amen**.