

Sermon: Third Sunday after Pentecost June 28/29, 2025

In the gospel today, Luke is chronicling Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. He will continue this journey over the next few months. So, as Jesus approaches a Samaritan village, he sends people ahead to find lodging and prepare for his arrival. But this particular village did not receive Jesus.

The way that Luke explains the rejection is that it is because Jesus has his face set toward Jerusalem. As you probably know, this means that Jesus is heading to Jerusalem.....but then why is this a problem?

There is a deep division between Samaritans and Jews over the proper worship site. While Jerusalem is the only proper location for Jewish worship, Samaritans worshipped at Mount Gerizim. (Gar' a zim). Mount Gerizim (Gar'a zim) is a center of Samaritan worship with a temple built on its summit. So, one of the differences between the Samaritans and the Jews is where the center of worship exists, and it is a significant difference. Enough of a difference to reject Jesus' request for lodging in this village.

Those in the village did not receive Jesus and his entourage as expected. Certainly, the reaction was not as James and John expected. It is tempting to interpret this as the Samaritan village has done something wrong because of course they should have invited Jesus and his fellow travelers to stay.

But the real invitation here is to observe how Jesus responds, even when he is rejected. We are also invited to see how James and John reacted to the rejection. Jesus shows no desire for judgement or retaliation upon the village for their reaction. Jesus' ministry in Luke is about restoration not vengeance, and an acknowledgement that everyone has the right to say "NO." Many people say 'No' to Jesus on a daily basis.

So, how about James and John? Jesus has been turned down....they have been turned down. To say they are angry may be an understatement....in their minds they believe that lodging should have been offered, they believe they are right, they believe that the Samaritans in the village are wrong, and misguided. As a way to justify their views, to prove they are right, to defend their faith is to strike out-to attack. They are eager to punish the Samaritans for their refusal to receive Jesus.

John and James were probably just assuming that people in the village would be happy to welcome Jesus. We don't know who it was in the village that rejected them, but they didn't just reject Jesus, they rejected James and John. Now they are now properly outraged. We've all felt this. The feeling in our gut when someone rejects us or our thoughts or ideas.

Now with all the indignation they could muster, they asked Jesus if he wanted them to "command fire to come down from heaven and to consume the village." Well, just for

starters, if Jesus wanted to bring down fire down on the village.....who needs James and John. Jesus is capable of bring down his own fire without the help of anyone.

However, this does give Jesus has the opportunity, to provide a lesson. According to Luke, he rebukes them. Now, we don't get any insight as to what He said, but he clearly reined them in. Perhaps in our contemporary language.....it would be something like this.....Whoa, settle down, put the weapons away, and take a breath.

Jesus was saying that we don't need to retaliate following every disappointment or disagreement, or perceived slight. I believe that Jesus was pointing out that it is too easy to get into a fight, and when you ask for something, you have to accept that "no" is always an option. Jesus demonstrates for us that giving people a choice is an act of love. Jesus does not disallow the 'no.' We all have choices; we are given the opportunity to make choices. Jesus did not force his way into the village, but accepted the judgement of the village.

When we think about the request to command fire come down upon the village, there is also no consideration given by James and John as to who were the people that refused the lodging.....for example, they didn't say, "Let us bring down fire on the mayor, or the landlord." There was no time taken to determine why there was a refusal for lodging, or by whom. Let's just bring fire down on the village.....bring the fire down on children, and every other innocent that had nothing to do with refusing Jesus. The reaction was for quick and total retaliation. It is important to realize that Jesus is reminding us that it is not right to punish people in his name.

I invite you to think about our world today. For starters, let's just take a moment to think about the nations of our world. How many nations are calling down fire on the innocents? How many innocents are homeless and starving every day, how many are injured or killed, because someone has decided to call down the fire. Can we think of places where the intent seems to be.....if we make those who are our adversaries suffer greatly.....perhaps that is the way to victory? If we bomb hospitals, schools, and places of worship we will show them we mean business. The reaction is, "Let us call down the fire." Let us call down the fire on people who do not believe as we do, let us call down the fire on those who are different than us. Let us call down the fire upon the innocents in Jesus' name. (Pause) As Jesus is watching.....I believe he is silently shouting, "STOP!"

I invite you to focus on us. If we focus on individuals and groups of people, do we see similar reactions to disagreements to a perceived slight in our everyday lives? Do we see people attack those who do not believe as we do? Do we see groups attacking other groups than do not agree? Do we see people who choose to punish others in Jesus' name?

If we now focus on individuals or groups in our communities. Do we see similar reactivity to disagreement or a perceived slight in our everyday lives? How about road rage.....do we

see people flying off the handle for the slightest provocation? Check your Facebook or Instagram feeds, and see how easy it is to begin a serious argument with very angry responses. Do we see people quick to attack those who do not believe as they do? Or do we see groups who are quick to attack other groups who do not believe as they do? Do we see people who choose to punish or cause harm in Jesus' name?

How many friends do not bring up certain topics because someone may become very upset? It wasn't always like that. There was a time that I remember when you could agree to disagree on almost anything and simply move on to the next topic.

Wanting to triumph over others is a powerful and dangerous path. It feels so good to win.....it feels great to be right.....to have God on our side....this is a great feeling. It is but a short step from the euphoria of being right and to rejoicing in the good news of Christ to attacking those around us who do not share in our same beliefs or thoughts. We all have the power to harm others that we consider to be outside our circle of belief or outside of agreeing with our point of view.....the people who act or look differently.....the people who do not believe as we do. The people that we want to call down the fire upon. When we focus on how right we are and how wrong others are we need to pause, and believe that Jesus is seeing the bickering, the hate, and the disharmony and silently shouts....."Stop."

So, when Jesus' disciples want to finger point or call down fire on innocents, Jesus rebukes them and tells them to move on.....just move on. Amen.