

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Third Sunday after Pentecost - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21

Psalm 16

Galatians 5: 1, 13-25

Luke 9:51-62

06/30/2019

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

51When the days drew near for [Jesus] to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. 52And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; 53but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. 54When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" 55But he turned and rebuked them. 56Then they went on to another village. 57As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." 58And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." 59To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." 60But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." 61Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." 62Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

The Gospel of our Lord.

**Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

**To Travail**

Good morning! In a previous sermon I talked about my experience in high school running cross country and track. I wasn't very good, but even as a freshman in cross country I was running a pretty good distance. Before every race we ran the entire course for a warm up. Then we ran the race, and afterward we did the whole course again. This meant that on a race day I was running 15 kilometers, or 9.3 miles. During our weekly practice I gradually worked my way up to 8 miles at my longest run.

But all of that distance was nothing compared to what Kenny Standley could do. Kenny was my supervisor for Clinical Pastoral Education, or CPE as we call it in seminary. We spent the summer being chaplains for a Lutheran retirement home and got to know Kenny pretty well. Kenny was a runner. When I met him he was suffering from shin splints and was taking it "easy," running only 12-15 miles at a time. A marathon was a good workout for him, and so for his 50th birthday he ran a 50 mile race! He's still at it, too. I checked up on him for this sermon and at 58 years old he just completed the Mount Mitchell Challenge in February. According to the internet, the race is a 40 mile ultramarathon that starts in Black Mountain, NC. The first half is a 20 mile race to the summit of Mt. Mitchell, and then back down again. It's intentionally run in

February to make sure it's a big enough "challenge" for the racers and is supposedly "*one of the most difficult trail-running races in North America.*"<sup>1</sup>

If that doesn't impress you, then check out the Marathon De Sables in Morocco. It's a 156 mile course across the hot sand of the Sahara that National Geographic described as "*a masochist's paradise.*"<sup>2</sup> The runners need to carry all their own gear and only have six days to complete the race. According to the website for the race they even ration WATER, and if you exceed the rationed amount, you get a time penalty!<sup>3</sup> The race was started in 1986, and then in 1994 things went from insanity to impossible for one participant.

There were only 134 competitors that year, and so for a bulk of the runners they went at it alone. 39 year old Italian Olympian Mauro Prospero was thrilled for the challenge that the event would hold. But on day 4, the longest stage of the race at roughly 57 miles, and 20 miles into the stage after ALREADY running 62 miles the previous three days, he was hit by a sandstorm. As the evening checkpoints began to come in, Mauro never showed. They began to search for him the following morning with air and ground search teams but had no luck. It turns out that while everyone else stopped during the storm Mauro tried to keep running, and by the time the storm stopped he was far off course. He tried to find his way back to the trail but with the sun setting he didn't see anything that looked familiar. Race protocol dictates that you stay

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount\\_Mitchell\\_Challenge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Mitchell_Challenge)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/travel/2016/04/top-5-toughest-physical-challenges>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.offgridweb.com/survival/alone-in-the-sahara-the-survival-story-of-mauro-prosperi/>

in one spot, so the next morning that's what he did. After no rescue, he began to walk the following day, and I'll spare you the lengths he went through to survive, but eight days later, after starting in Morocco, he had walked 180 miles off course into the country of Algeria before stumbling upon a caravan who took him to a village to await a rescue. He weighed only 99 pounds when he arrived at a hospital and wasn't able to eat solid food for several month. It took a total of two years before he recovered fully.<sup>4</sup>

Can you imagine being so disciplined and committed to even begin a race that demanding? Can you imagine having the level of perseverance needed to survive those eight days? Have any of us in our lives had that sort of commitment about anything? Because that's what Jesus is asking for in today's Gospel lesson.

If you're anything like me, this text hits you like a bucket of ice water first thing in the morning. It's shocking! It's not the "gentle and loving lamb" Jesus we get today, it's a Jesus set on his destination: Jerusalem. The New Revised Standard Version translates the first verse of the lesson as "*he set his face to go,*" but it literally means "*he hardened his face to go.*"<sup>5</sup> There is a sense that this won't be easy right from the opening of the story.

The story could be broken up into two parts, the incident in the Samaritan village and the questions along the road. In the first part we see Jesus sending messengers ahead of him to announce his arrival but the Samaritan village does not welcome him. The Jews didn't consider the Samaritans to be authentic "clean" Jews and so shunned the group entirely. One of the main points of argument between the two was the correct

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Johnson, Luke T., and Daniel J. Harrington. *The Gospel of Luke*. Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1991. p. 162.

place to worship God. The Samaritans believed it was on Mt. Gerizim, the Jews believed it was in Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> So it's understandable that when they found out where Jesus was heading, they would be a little less than welcoming.

The reaction of James and John seems pretty extreme, and it is, but you need to understand that these two brothers had a nickname, the "sons of thunder." So, maybe calling down fire isn't so crazy a reaction after-all. What does surprise me is how quickly the disciples have forgotten a crucial lesson. In the beginning of Luke 9:1 Jesus tells the disciples that when a town is unwelcoming to them to move on, shake the dust from their feet. All of that seems to fly out of the disciples' minds. But thankfully Jesus responds differently. In the words of one writer: *"Jesus does not choose to punish those who are reluctant to support him, even today. Instead, we are reminded again and again that ours is a savior of love, who is not about punishing all who resist or compelling everyone to get in line or face the consequences, but one who invites those who believe to walk the journey with him."*<sup>7</sup>

The second half of the story sees Jesus answering and talking with three would-be followers along the road. The first is reminded that being a Christian, a follower of Jesus, could mean having nowhere to call home, no place to lay down to rest. The second and third are reminded that one's faith commitment should be one that supersedes even the ties to families. Fred Craddock re-phrases Jesus' demands asking *"I am totally dependent on the hospitality of others; are you willing to follow me?"* And stating that *"loyalty to me takes precedence over a primary filial obligation."* He

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word. Year C, Vol. 3* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. p. 192.

summarizes a short time later saying that *“The radicality of Jesus’ words lies in his claim to priority over the best, not the worst of human relationships. Jesus never said to choose him over the devil but to choose him over the family.”*<sup>8</sup> If you’re ready to run out the door, it’s ok, we’re all having the same reaction to the demands that Jesus places on faith. You’ll notice that I didn’t say that it was ok because I had an explanation out of the demand. That’s because I don’t think we should run away from what Jesus is saying. I think he is right, that our faith needs to be taken this seriously. We haven’t been called to live out our faith in ho-hum ways that take things for granted, that put our commitment to God on the back burner whenever we feel like it. And please notice the use of “we” in these statements, because this applies to everyone, including myself. I have often said that our God is a jealous God, wanting all of us. The question for all of us today is this: How much are you ready to give? Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> Craddock, Fred B. *Luke*. Louisville, Ky: John Knox Press, 1990. p. 114.