

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (PROPER 8C)

1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21, Psalm 16, Luke 9:51-62

June 26, 2016

St. Mark's-in-the-Valley Episcopal Church, Los Olivos, California

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What truly matters

Almighty God, send down upon your Church the riches of your Spirit, and kindle in the whole people of God, who minister the gospel, your countless gifts of grace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Based on the Additional Collects, The Church of England

Every once in awhile, you realize that a corner has been turned, a shift has happened and everything is different; life will never again be the same as it was before.

In the story of Jesus that Luke tells, this is one of those moments.

It isn't as if extraordinary things haven't been happening.

Just before what we hear today, Jesus calms the storm, casts out demons, heals a woman, restores the life of a girl, and feeds multitudes. Peter comes to see and proclaims that Jesus is the messiah (though Jesus' had to adjust Peter's understanding of what "messiah" means) and there is the experience of dazzling light on the mountain of transfiguration where Peter, James and John see the vision of Jesus speaking with Moses and Elijah and hear the voice of God speaking to them.

And that was just in the couple of chapters leading up to what we hear today.

A lot was going on.

But then we find Jesus resolutely changing course, rounding a corner from which he cannot return. Luke says: "he set his face to go to Jerusalem."

He's leaving the small towns and villages, the countryside, and moving to the center of religious and political power; he's taking his utter commitment to life and love to the bastion of the status quo, to those at the center of neutralizing God with empty religious forms, to those who oppressively and violently assert the pattern of death, division and destruction, to those who imagine the whole of creation and all the gifts of God are meant only for a few elites, and not for everybody.

His purpose is fixed, nothing will re-direct him or deter him.

Does he really know where he is going?

Does he see the details of his betrayal, his suffering and death?

Some will say he could see it all, but my guess is not.

He knew his call was not mainstream – that he was constantly encountering and countering business as usual and showing another way. And he knew his disruption wasn't always popular; usually wasn't (part of why he kept moving).

And in what we heard today, there it was again – his traveling companions who had gone on ahead had experienced rejection from the Samaritans, and the disciples wanted to do what we normally do today when people get in our way – they wanted to blow them up and burn them down. They were, after all, religious inferiors in the eyes of the established religious majority – what's there to lose?

Jesus will have none of it.

Jesus shows them he is essentially different, he views the world, he views people – all people – from an alternative perspective.

And Jesus, at this point, has a fixed and compelling purpose that is driving him forward.

And he could certainly sense that his days in Jerusalem would not be smooth sailing, surely there would be a cost – a cost he was already paying... and even more

ready to pay.

He warns a would-be follower not to expect secure and comfortable accommodations with this traveller who had nowhere to lay his head – because everywhere, the whole world was calling him.

The point was not to be right, but to be faithful at heart, to love without counting the cost, to reveal the possibilities of a life, of all lives.

The point was to act and not wait...

...to *not* get ready to get ready to get ready....

...to *not* make sure everything was perfect, decks clear, ducks all in a row.

That's what he's getting at in saying to let the dead bury their own dead and don't go back to say goodbye to friends and family. He's pointing out that conditions never seem to be conducive to what God is showing to be the way forward, to be God's full and transforming life – and, in fact, often, everything seems to be all wrong...

...as it will continue to seem in Jesus' own life, coming from the margins, increasingly reviled, ultimately thrown aside and killed.

Where *we* might say, "let's figure it all out first," Jesus beckons people who are with him to just see what happens, to rely on God-in-the-moment as real life – which is to say life with actual

suffering and confusion and challenge and difference and change – [as real life] actually happens.

Our lives, our world are constantly confronting us, accosting us, constantly pushing us, and we can see in Jesus what to do when what is pushing us has taken us around that corner of no return.

I want to share again part of what I said last week about this time in our world that is increasingly polarized, violent and frightening – and I think it applies to our own personal and community life experiences that so often fill us with fear and threaten to paralyze us with confusion and distress.

Krista Tippett, the host of *On Being* recently interviewed the Stanford brain surgeon, Dr. James Doty who said it this way: “Most of us have a tendency to desire pleasure rather than pain. I think anyone who has lived a life – which means you have had pain and suffering – realizes that there is a gift in the pain and suffering, because what it allows you to do is to see the reality that **this is** part of life. And it’s part of a meaningful life.

“And when you’re able to take that pain and suffering and use it to not hide from the world, to use it not to be afraid of every interaction, but to use it to say,

yes, it is hard sometimes, but I have learned so many lessons and have become more appreciative and have more gratitude, and see in so many examples how, **in the face of the greatest adversity, people have shown their greatest humanity.** And it’s when you recognize this, *that* is when you’re most proud of actually being part of the human species.”

Dr. Doty says, “I appreciate that every day, I have the capacity to, through my actions, improve the life of at least one person. And what we forget sometimes is even smiling at another person, which takes very little effort, for that person who receives that smile, it can mean an immense amount. And not to forget that these small, little actions, these little ripples, can actually end up creating a tsunami if each of us engage in them. Remember, when a person – and we know this from the science – when a person sees another person engage in a positive behavior, they are many, many times more likely to engage in that behavior themselves. When they see another person act with kindness, and with generosity, and with gratitude...”

Dr. Doty’s remarkable story is in his interview on the onbeing.org website. He concludes saying, “We are at the beginning of an age of compassion.”

He describes an age of compassion saying: "...as you know, we had an age of enlightenment, which had a profound effect on our human species. And I believe that ... the positive effect, of compassion in little pockets in society and how profound it can be ... as we manifest these little pockets of compassion and caring for the other, it is ultimately going to be recognized that this is the path that will lead us out of darkness into light."

We cannot avoid what challenges us in these violent days, in seasons of loss, of uncertainty and instability in our lives.

We can, though, move ahead with resolve, with clarity of purpose, with commitment to live in love, to be part of an unfolding age of compassion and to not be deterred or distracted or derailed as we see what happens, see what God is doing in us and with us, what is now being revealed through all that is painful, all that causes us to suffer, through all that challenges us in ways we may never have been challenged before.

For Jesus it was Jerusalem and all that undid his life there.

And then, in God's eternal pattern of undying love, there was, completely unimagined, completely unexpected: Easter. Resurrection. New life.



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