

A sermon delivered by the Rev. Dr. Janine Wilson, associate minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, June 30 2013, the 6th Sunday after Pentecost.

“Peripatetic Nomad”

Luke 9:51-62; Kings 2:1-2

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Dedicated to all who take the risk to follow the Christ, in spite of the opinion of others, to the place they trust God is leading them. Let us pray; Almighty God, you call us to be your servant people, listen for your voice and step up your call. You make it clear the way is not easier just because you call us. So here we are, reporting for duty. We have come to listen, to serve, to keep our mistakes on the low side and our love for you on the high side. May you grant us courage for the passing of each day, of each hour.
Amen

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I have to admit it – I can’t read this passage without hearing the scratchy, earthy voice of Willie Nelson singing “On the road again, just can’t wait to get back on the road again,” partly because I want to lighten up the tone. This passage is not one for the faint of heart. Luke paints a picture of Jesus as either a grouchy sailor or a peripatetic nomad, leaving us to wonder why the three disciples followed him at all. If we are wise, we also end up wondering if we are on the right track as well.

There they were - standing at the edge of time - and Jesus knows it. His words raise up so many Sunday school teachers of our past – the ones who had him walking on water, calming the sea, turning water into wine, taking sides with women and Samaritans and everyone else the general public seemed to abandon or push off to the margins. The pictures are almost too gigantic. Is it all hyperbole or is there substance? How can we tell the difference?

At the beginning of this journey, Luke tells us this is the one and only trip Jesus makes to Jerusalem. He finished his work in Galilee and he has “*set his face toward Jerusalem.*” When he gets there he will be gone in only a week. Not gone, as it walking to the next place, but gone as he is passed through a slipshod pretend trial, faced the agonies to come and forgives in a way that had never happened before or since.

I believe Jesus’ gruffness is on purpose. New life is not an easy birth. He knows his three friends have to choose to squeeze through that eye of a needle and go with eyes wide open. In this light, Jesus’ grouchy words melt into no-nonsense kindness. They are in training. They will make it through to the end.

While his companions had given up their daily tasks to be with Jesus, this was going to be more than retraining for a new career. They were going to be pressed into lives that would quickly swing out of control.

When I look at my own life and to some of your lives, I see things have bumped and jostled us, storms of life have drenched us – deaths of a loved ones, unpredictable illnesses, surgeries scheduled, tests done, delays raised up diseases battled, lost and won. We like calmer waters; calmer solutions, control over what happens. Maybe that’s part of the rise of our desire, need, for constant communications. If we know everything every minute – who said what, who felt what, who left, who arrived, who was taken up into the clouds – then the false sense of being in control would still reign.

No such luck today. This morning the disciples get kicked into high gear – Jesus tells them to pack up and hit the road – no looking back. Their first encounter is with the Samaritans and it didn’t go well for Jesus. They saw he was preoccupied and chose not to spend time there. Suddenly it’s like an unruly highway biker has been set free. You don’t like the response of the Samaritans Lord? Here, let me point a flame thrower in their direction. Jesus says, no, just follow me.

Next came the debate about taking care of business before leaving town. Will all of you who would not want to say goodbye to families and friends before a journey to somewhere or nowhere of

undetermined length raise your hand? I remember when I was younger, kids in tow; traveling across the United States; when I would leave, my mother always stood at the edge of the sidewalk, gave a gentle wave while fighting back tears, and gave me a smile at the same time. Sad and happy, we hold hands throughout our life, even as Jesus calls us to set the long farewell aside, because when all is said and done, if we are going to follow Jesus, we need to know we are not in control. There are times when looking back over our shoulder will not take us where we need to go.

Could you do it? Could you stand there at the edge of town and just walk away with Jesus?

I can answer for some of you, now that we've been together for a few years. The answer is yes, yes you could, yes you have and yes you will again. You will go where God sends you even when you are not sure at first. You do it all the time.

- You say no to lies, no to abuse, no to power that presses down on others instead of lifting them up.
- You spend time feeding the hungry, time investing in the future for others who are the have not's, even when you barely fall on the other side.
- And you are willing to march - be public in your commitments. You give to the church and through the church.
- You cheer with joy when you see the picture of Bert and Ernie snuggling on the sofa watching the Supreme Court on the TV in front of them because you recognize if we do this thing called following Christ everyone is loved, everyone is valued and everyone is cherished. Your trust shines and it is also contagious.

I met a man a long time ago who, when he was fresh out of Duke University, he stepped into the Air Force Reserves. Arriving on base in Texas was exciting and overwhelming. He wondered what was he going to say or do that might provide a sense of authority and comfort as the chaplain, to men and women who were older and had lived lives dramatically different than his own?

Not too long after his arrival, his fears were laid to rest. The base chaplain greeted him, and from then on, Matthew watched while the chaplain walked the stations. From one station to the next, the chaplain would stop, ask how things were going and listen. Sometimes there were smiles, other times sadness would rise up and visit for awhile. Sometimes only the sparsest of details of life were exchanged, but in the end, every visit found the same rhythm. First came the practical, appropriate military exchange of words, then the chaplain with almost no new words – just short phrases like, “And what else? . . . “That so” He listened to one life story after another. When they ran out of day or ran out of stations to visit, Matthew began to understand his call was simply to “be with.” God always takes care of the rest.

We may not always be in control of our next step, truth is, Jesus may not be either, but we can trust God is with us and will bring us to the other side. Ask anyone struggling with a troubled marriage, or addiction, or a child who has gone astray. They will tell us in a heartbeat that control doesn’t really work. The answer is imbedded in knowing God is with us on the journey even in the sometimes craziness of our turbulent world and the most personal moments of our life. In faith, we are called to trust our Savior, pace and lead until we walk in step, teach and learn as we move into the future one footstep at a time.

All those amazing things I raised up a few minutes ago – the list of things you do – reach out now and let others learn from you. Walk with them, teach them, tell each other your stories and before you know it, there will be twice as many disciples than there were when the journey began.

Jesus calls you – Jesus call us – to be Peripatetic Nomads – walking and rolling along on the path God stretches out before us. Now is our time to find the courage to trust, take our place together, as a faith-filled tribe, to be a people walking on ground that is sometimes clear of weeds and thorns, sometimes barren, sometimes rough, but as Jesus followers on the Way, always trusting we are blessed to be a blessing.