

St. David's Episcopal Church, Proper 8C, Luke 9:51-62 (Elizabeth Felicetti)

Now that we are in ordinary time, we're back to working our way through the Gospel of Luke, and today's passage marks a significant turning point: in the first verse, Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem." Until this point in Luke's Gospel, Jesus has primarily been ministering around Galilee. The last time we saw him in Jerusalem was when he was twelve, after his parents lost him then found him in the temple, confidently sitting among the rabbis, listening and asking questions. Luke's gospel is unique in telling us both that story as well as Jesus setting his face toward Jerusalem.

We know that this journey to Jerusalem leads Jesus to an unjust arrest and crucifixion, but the journey was not entirely negative. Notice that we are in chapter nine, and they don't get to Jerusalem until partway through chapter nineteen. So that's ten more chapters with meals and prayers and warnings and healings and parables and blessings. We will be talking about these adventures on the journey over the next five months. Like so many journeys, it was rich and full. The crucifixion, of course, was not the end of the journey. Jesus was resurrected, and Luke's gospel ends with the Ascension. You've probably heard that saying about long journeys beginning with a first step. This journey, however, begins with Jesus setting his face toward Jerusalem. He opens his heart to all that is to come.

What I have felt the Spirit whispering to me about this week, however, is not "journey" as much as "home." Jesus says in this passage that the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. Another would-be disciple says he needs to go home first to say farewell. Jesus is not impressed by this impulse.

What does that say about our concept of home today?

In Bible study this past week, we talked about hometowns, and many of us felt that our hometown was the place where we were born or where we primarily grew up, although some grew up in a variety of places and did not consider any of them home. I still catch myself referring to Arizona as "home," even though my home is with Gary in our house in Loch Braemar that has a view of a pond we aren't allowed to go in.

I consider Phoenix my hometown. When I first moved to Virginia as a military wife, some very polite locals told me that no matter how long we lived here or how much we loved it, we would never be Virginians because we weren't born here.

Leaving Arizona when I was 22 was not hard for me. I was excited to leave, to move to California. But when I met Gary there five years later, I was already considering moving back "home." For me, home represented comfort. When I have met people here in Virginia who had ties to Arizona, especially if they grew up there, I have felt an instant connection. They felt like relatives. Like home.

We also talk about church as "home." I often tell newcomers that I hope they will make St. David's their church home. I think of us all as a family, and that's often what people who settle at St. David's are seeking. We are small enough to feel like a family. We have a variety of ages and viewpoints like a family, complete with eccentric uncles and insanely smart children and

people on opposite sides of contentious issues. But readings like this morning's gospel give me pause. What would Jesus think of our St. David's family? Are we too much like the kind of home that the young man wanted to say farewell to *before* following Jesus?

"The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head," Jesus said. Followed by, "Follow me."

Our mission as a church family is to follow Jesus before it is to provide a comfortable place to see all the people we know. We are called as Christians to welcome the stranger and to speak about our faith, even when it makes us feel uncomfortable.

The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head, Jesus said. Sounds like comfort wasn't one of his core values. The only two times I found Jesus using the word comfort—in translation, of course, using the NRSV version—it was in contrast to another word. In Matthew (5:4), he says blessed are those who mourn now, for they will be comforted. And in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man later in Luke, the rich man is reminded in the afterlife that he received his good things during his lifetime and now it is time for Lazarus, who used to starve outside the rich man's gate covered in sores: now it is Lazarus's turn to be comforted (16:25).

We aren't called to seek our own comfort first. Take our ethos about children here at St. David's, for example. Sometimes having children in church can make church a little less comfortable for some. But these little ones are whom we want to make the most comfortable and welcome here. We want them to grow up here knowing God's safety and love and the comfort of their church family. They won't get that in another room. And think of the discomforts young parents have getting to church with little kids. Last week there was one point in my sermon when things were a little louder than usual, but what I noticed even more were two women across the aisle from some of the children who were present last week *beaming* at a baby. Just beaming. Because those noises are joyful here in church. Maybe sometimes they come with a little discomfort because we miss a word here or there, but you can look up my sermons afterwards if you miss something, either the text or a playback of the whole service or any part of it on our website. Children are a joy and following Jesus means seeking their comfort before our own.

Most of us who are longer term Episcopalians find comfort in the order of service and in our liturgy, but we change the prayers seasonally and bring in authorized new ones because changing those words around, while sometimes sparking a little discomfort, helps us to hear the word fresh, anew. We sing hymns that are ancient and some songs that are newer, and the choir offers different anthems. While being part of a liturgical church means that we find home in the shape of the service, we don't want to get comfortable to the point of becoming stale.

Churches are different than they were when many of us were children. A larger percentage of the population went to church then. The changing role of church in society might make us uncomfortable, but it's not an entirely bad thing. Some discomfort isn't a bad thing.

How is our church both like and unlike "home" for you? What can you do to make this place more comfortable not for yourself, but for others?