

Sunday June 29, 2025
Third Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 8

Sermon: “You want me to do what?”

I couldn't decide this week. Do I read the lesson from 2 Kings, you know, the one in which Elijah, and his protégé Elisha, take a journey. Elijah knows he is about to be taken up into the heavens, and he repeatedly tries to put some distance between himself and Elisha, but Elisha is insistent. “As the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you,” he tells Elijah. In the end, Elisha is there as Elijah is taken up into the heavens and sees the very moment of Elijah's departure. He receives a double portion of Elijah's spirit, as he requested, picks up Elijah's mantle (a cloak or cape) which has fallen off, rolls it up and strikes the waters of the Jordan causing them to part, and crosses over on dry land to start his ministry. Do I read that story, or the gospel lesson we read?

While I pondered each text and deeper meanings, I thought about the story of Naomi and her daughter-in-law, Ruth. Elisha's words echo the sentiment of Ruth's words to Naomi. Naomi, Ruth, and Ruth's sister-in-law have all lost their husbands and Naomi is bound and determined to return to the land of Israel. She implores her daughters-in-law to remain in their homeland and find new husbands. Ruth refuses and tells Naomi, “Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried.”

Both stories, Elisha's and Ruth's speak about the depths of their commitment in following their mentors. Both stories are about journeys, both physical and spiritual. In a way, both stories point to the commitment we Christians make in following in Jesus' footsteps, and our Christian journeys. All of that got me to thinking about our upcoming journey, Barbara's and mine.

Two weeks from tomorrow Barbara and I take off for our camping trip to Manitoulin Island. Barbara made the reservations last summer and confirmed them in January. She's booked and paid for the ferry crossings. Meanwhile, I've started other preparations. The wheel bearings on the trailer have been

greased. The trailer has been washed and waxed. I've checked to see that the new mattress, the life jackets, the outdoor rug, and a few other odds and ends are loaded in the trailer. I've checked the kitchen supplies, linens, and assorted small items, such as tick and mosquito repellent, hatchet, clothesline, clothespins, water shoes, matches, flashlights, tablecloth and clips are all present and accounted for. The bikes have been checked, including the tire pressure. The kayaks are ready to go. Our clothing bins are ready to be packed. All we really need to do is to pack the food, fill the cooler and load the car. When we get to Manitoulin, we need to stop at the hardware store and pick up some camp fuel for the Coleman stove.

And then I read the gospel lesson. Jesus told one would-be follower, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." I was struck to the core. Are we, like the 70 that Jesus sent out, to take only what we are wearing when we travel? No purse of money, no spare sandals, no second cloak, no walking stick, just the clothes on our back? Wow! If Jesus could see all of the stuff we are preparing to take with us for only a three week camping trip I'm sure he'd be dismayed. Not only did he not have a cooler of food and a Coleman stove to cook it on, he didn't even have so much as a tent to sleep in, let alone a tent trailer, or a car to pull it with.

It made me stop and think about exactly what it is that Jesus calls us to. A sober second look at his ministry left me feeling pretty uncomfortable, to say the least. Surely Jesus doesn't expect us to leave home without our Amex Card, or car, or tent trailer, or food, or, or, or..... But Jesus, I like my cup of fresh perked coffee in the morning at the campsite. Surely Jesus doesn't expect us to have nowhere to lay our head, or to hang out with the people living in the margins in our society, like the homeless, the drug addicts, the sex trade workers and the mentally ill? I mean, their behaviour is, well, peculiar at best, and they smell bad, and they could be dangerous.... We could get hurt, and I'm not just talking about physical injury.

This past week someone I know, someone who was a gentle soul, kind and generous to a fault. And smart too. He died as the result of mental illness. And it hurts. Mostly it hurts to think that he was in that much pain and there appeared to be nothing anybody could do to alleviate his pain. Surely Jesus doesn't want us to risk getting hurt.

Being a Christian, a follower of Jesus, is not for the faint of heart. It is most assuredly not easy. It is a lifelong commitment; one that we make each and every day when we get up in the morning. Jesus risked everything, even his very life, to show us how God intended us to live from the very beginning. Love the Lord you God with all your mind and all your heart and all your strength, and love your neighbour as yourself. Following faithfully can cost us much – a place to lay our head at night, the opportunity to bury our loved ones, the chance to say goodbye to those we may never see again, a cup of freshly perked coffee first thing in the morning. In some parts of the world being Christian can still cost you your life. AND, being a Christian, a follower of Jesus, can give you riches you never imagined existed. I hurt at the news of the death of that person. I hurt because of the connection we made, and that connection was priceless. OK Jesus. I'll follow again today. If only I had the strength of Elisha or Ruth and could say that I will never leave you. Do you have Elisha or Ruth's strength? What sacrifices are you willing to make to follow where Jesus is leading? What is Jesus asking of you today?