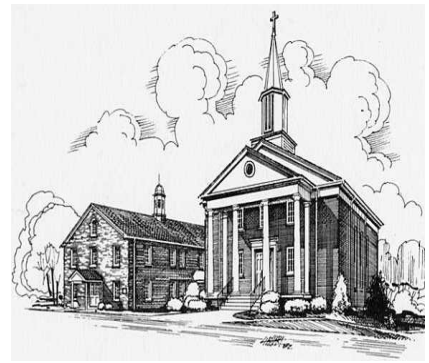


*The Lessons Appointed for Use on the*  
**Sixth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Proper 8**

**Year C**

**RCL**



1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21

Psalms 77:1-2, 11-20

Luke 9:51-62

**The Collect**

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20

*Voce mea ad Dominum*

- 1 I will cry aloud to God; \*  
I will cry aloud, and he will hear me.
- 2 In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; \*  
my hands were stretched out by night and did not  
tire;  
I refused to be comforted.
- 11 I will remember the works of the LORD, \*  
and call to mind your wonders of old time.
- 12 I will meditate on all your acts \*  
and ponder your mighty deeds.
- 13 Your way, O God, is holy; \*  
who is so great a god as our God?
- 14 You are the God who works wonders \*  
and have declared your power among the peoples.
- 15 By your strength you have redeemed your people, \*  
the children of Jacob and Joseph.
- 16 The waters saw you, O God;  
the waters saw you and trembled; \*  
the very depths were shaken.
- 17 The clouds poured out water;  
the skies thundered; \*

your arrows flashed to and fro;

18 The sound of your thunder was in the whirlwind;  
your lightnings lit up the world; \*  
the earth trembled and shook.

19 Your way was in the sea,  
and your paths in the great waters, \*  
yet your footsteps were not seen.

20 You led your people like a flock \*  
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

**1 Kings 19:15-16,19-21**

The LORD said to Elijah, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place.”

So he set out from there, and found Elisha son of Shaphat, who was plowing. There were twelve yoke of oxen ahead of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle over him. He left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, “Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.” Then Elijah said to him, “Go back again; for what have I done to you?” He returned from following him, took the yoke of oxen, and slaughtered them; using the equip-

ment from the oxen, he boiled their flesh, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out and followed Elijah, and became his servant.

**Luke 9:51-62**

When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. When 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?” But he turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village.

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” And 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.” To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to

him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus said to him, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

## SERMON

“Now it came to pass that a group existed who called themselves fishermen. And lo, there were many fish in the waters all around. In fact, the whole area was surrounded by streams and lakes filled with fish. And the fish were hungry.

Week after week, month after month, and year after year, these who called themselves fishermen met in meetings and talked about their call to fish, the abundance of fish, and how they might go about fishing. Year after year they carefully defined what fishing means, defended fishing as an occupation, and declared that fishing is always to be a primary task of fishermen.

Continually, they searched for new and better methods of fishing and for new and better definitions of fishing. Further they said, “The fishing industry exists by fishing as fire exists by burning.” They loved slogans such



as “Fishing is the task of every fisherman.” They sponsored special meetings called “Fishermen’s Campaigns” and “The Month for Fishermen to Fish.” They sponsored costly nationwide and world-wide congresses to discuss fishing and to promote fishing and hear about all the ways of fishing such as the new fishing equipment, and whether any new bait had been discovered.

These fishermen built large, beautiful buildings called “Fishing Headquarters.” The plea was that everyone should be a fisherman and every fisherman should fish. One thing they didn’t do, however: They didn’t fish.”<sup>1</sup>

We are talking about commitment today and my job is to find a way to get across the meaning of commitment required as a disciple of Christ without discouraging you so badly that you give up and just build another Fishing Headquarters. Tricky.

---

<sup>1</sup> Darrell W. Robinson, *People Sharing Jesus*, Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1995, pp21-22

As our Gospel story opens, Jesus had “turned his face to Jerusalem”. He was on his last trip. He knew well what awaited him. In Jerusalem, he would confront the powers of a secular society which fancied itself to be righteous and declare to them that they had no power but that given to them. He would be lifted up and the full force of every evil impulse of which the human heart is capable would be leveled at him. From the cross he would absorb all of that. He would absorb the worst the human mind could conceive of to do to him, and he would render it powerless.

He pulled no punches in telling those about him of the sort of commitment required to be a follower of Christ.

To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Another said, “I will follow you,

Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus said to him, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Can you grasp the all-consuming nature of what Jesus is demanding? It’s no wonder that our hearts sometimes fail at the thought of that much commitment. It can be overwhelming. It is, nonetheless, what Jesus demands of each of us. The old hymn, “The Gospel Plow” says it well:

I put my hand to the Gospel Plow  
And I wouldn’t take nothin’ for my journey now.  
Put your hand on the plow of God.  
Hold on. Hold on.  
Put your hand on the plow, hold on.

When we get overwhelmed it’s easy to take our hand from that Gospel Plow and focus on easier, less demanding things. I was teaching the kids at VBS one year. That’s a laugh. I’m terrible with kids, but I let my-

self be talked into it. The kids were 4<sup>th</sup> graders and it was Thursday of VBS. These were tired, bored kids and they were now faced with some ugly old guy who was going to teach them a story which would be good for them in some way not clear to them. Their commitment to this VBS thing had been depleted. They were tired. As I was trying to tell the story, one little boy pulled down a pew cushion onto the floor. With one eye on me and the other on the adult ladies responsible for him, he began building a fort. He lay on the pew cushion, then with his left hand, he held up another as a wall, and with his right, yet another. Now he had a problem. To finish his fort, he needed a pew cushion on top as a roof, but every time he released a wall to get another cushion, the wall he was holding up collapsed. His goal was to build something secure enough that he didn't have to listen to anymore of this story because he was

DONE WITH VBS. His commitment to the activity had lapsed. The more I watched, the less I saw a bored little boy and the more I saw bored Christians trying to substitute church activities for the sort of commitment Jesus is showing us. If you can't generate the commitment Jesus is talking about, maybe you can build a youth wing, and maybe that will be good enough! It won't be. Youth wings are good. Commitment is vital.

We have made those things we do for the church and our commitment to follow Jesus into synonyms. It's as if we believe that Jesus offers us a choice of a personal relationship with him or the chance to volunteer for church maintenance, either one. The commitment Jesus is speaking of, though, doesn't really offer a choice like that, does it? Jesus is saying "I'm calling you into a personal relationship with me which will just eat up all your heart and your mind and your strength and will

transform you from the ground up.”

Yes, there are planes to catch and bills to pay, and there are well-loved church traditions to be followed, and church luncheons to be prepared and there’s Vacation Bible School, but Jesus speaks not a word of any of this. Instead, he turned his face to Jerusalem and what he knew awaited him in God’s own city. His commitment to his task was unbending, uncompromising.

This is what makes Jesus’ words sound so harsh, so inflexible. He has turned his face to Jerusalem. He has put his hand to the Gospel Plow. For Jesus there is no turning back. Those in the Samaritan village who refused to receive him were not punished. He rebuked his disciples for suggesting it. That would be only an impediment to him now. Now is the time for the king who has turned his face to his calling. Now is the time for the very power of God to confront the earthly forces

which had twisted the world from what it should be, to absorb the very worst it could do, and defeat it. Jesus had turned his face toward Jerusalem and those whose commitment was less were not fit to follow. He had his hand on the Gospel Plow and required no less of those who would come with him into the transformed world he was preparing.

As Jesus would hang from a cross, so the world would hang from a fulcrum, balanced between what was and what would be. Is it any wonder that at such a time Jesus would say, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God”? Jesus had turned his face to Jerusalem, and his work in Jerusalem was all that he could consider.

The commitment to which Jesus calls us is a commitment to confronting the powers in the world which numb us to the needs of our neighbors. The commit-

ment to which Jesus calls us is one to live within the will of God. There will always be planes to catch and bills to pay. The suffering of your family in God will always be before you as well. Choose well.

AMEN



## BENEDICTION

Paul wrote:

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Heed his words well, church.

---

---

*Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.*

The Bible texts of the Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel lessons are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, and used by permission.

The Collects, Psalms and Canticles are from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979.

Sermon Copyright © 2013 J. Stewart Schneider

---

---