Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“Jesus rebuked them, and they journeyed to the next village” (Luke 9:56).

Zec 8:20-23; Luke 9:51-56

Zechariah’s prophecy that the nations of world will stream to Israel to find God contrasts sharply with the resistance Jesus encounters as he passes through Samaria. A village will not welcome him because he is on the way to Jerusalem. The hostility between Jews and Samaritans goes back to the time after the exile when returning Jews excluded those who had remained on the land and intermarried with foreigners. They were despised as collaborators and no longer worthy to be part of the Chosen People.

This rift is exacerbated by James and John, who ask Jesus if they should call down fire to consume the village. They see themselves as prophets like Elijah or Elisha, instruments of God’s wrath. Jesus is focused on his own rejection and death in Jerusalem, and he rebukes them for misunderstanding his mission. Even as he is preparing to offer himself to reconcile sinners to God and to proclaim divine mercy to the world, two of his closest disciples are hot for a fight and the destruction of an entire village.

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were among the first disciples called by Jesus. What was it about these two fishermen brothers that would make them into good Apostles? Luke identifies them as the “Sons of Thunder” because of their stormy personal approach to ministry. Along with their eagerness to destroy an entire village for lack of hospitality, they also tried to stop others from casting out demons in Jesus’ name to protect their own special status as Apostles. They are ambitious

and competitive, but sly enough to have their mother lobby for them. Why did Jesus call these two hot-tempered and devious brothers from their fishing boats to be among his closest companions?

We romanticize the Apostles in the same way we romanticize the entire New Testament. A hillbilly carpenter calls smelly fishermen to be his partners and, gathering others of dubious repute along the way, he heads down to Jerusalem to take on the establishment. That the carpenter turns out to be the Son of God does not change the earthy reality of the story or transform its actors into likable heroes and saints. That would come later. What Jesus assembled as his inner circle was more like a sampler for human pride and weakness than a dream team. The Gospel enters a messy world, works through sinful people to uncover the divine mystery within history.

To be called to follow Jesus is to be invited to a process of personal transformation. We must put away our anger and impatience to achieve our own agendas and instead harness ourselves to Jesus. We imitate him as he emerges in our imaginations shaped by the Scriptures and our own experience of life. We learn what works and doesn't work to make us better persons, more loving and forgiving. Jesus is both teacher and textbook, example and exercise under the guidance of the Spirit who moves though our moods and thoughts like a breath of discernment. Follow me, this way, that way, stop, go forward, speak, be silent, learn from everything, find God in all things. Like the beautiful image from Zechariah 8:23, we take Jesus "by the sleeve," and he leads us to God.

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