

Sermon- Proper 8 (C)
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2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14

Psalm 16

Galatians 5:1,13-25

St. Timothy's (Herndon)
June 29, 2025

Luke 9:51-62

OPENING:

I love a good training montage in movies—you know the scene where the hero of the story has to go through a series of exercises for the ultimate goal.

You can recognize these scenes because the theme song kicks in unsubtly, alongside images of the hero going through their physical/ mental training. Think Daniel-san getting trained by Mr. Miyagi in *The Karate Kid* or Rocky punching huge slabs of meat in Soviet Russia to get ready to fight Ivan Drago.¹

So... imagine, while Jesus is getting the disciples ready in our reading—having set his face for Jerusalem, having left the confines of home in Galilee, embarking on this journey to the climactic end on the Cross— imagine “You’re the Eye of the Tiger” or some other cheesy 1980’s rock ballad playing in the background.

Jesus knows that the journey will be full of trials and tribulations for himself and the disciples, and that their discipleship will require formation and discipline and skills that they might not possess.

Jesus’ training is different from climbing up the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art or “Wax on, Wax off” but following Jesus does mean carrying some form of a cross.

The disciples are lucky, of course, to have such a good teacher, Jesus the skilled rabbi, the patient trainer and wise *sensei*.

In this Season after Pentecost, this Ordinary Time, during the Summer Lull, after the Bishop’s Visitation and the Pre-School 50th, maybe it’s a good moment for us to take a look at the disciples’ training and, then, reflect on our own here at St.

Timothy’s... about this process of discipleship, about how we fill up our spiritual wells for the tasks before us, about how *we* train to do God’s work in this world.

GOSPEL:

In our reading, the disciples’ first training station comes in Samaria:

¹ <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/TrainingMontage?from=Main.GonnaFlyNowMontage>

that embattled zone between Galilee and Jerusalem, a historically inhospitable and downright hostile place to Jews.

A bad place to be, a good place to test one's muscles and verve.

The Samaritans play their part and turn away James and John, the ace students, the Senior and Junior Warden of the disciples.

James and John *think* that they know the next move, that they are ready to show off their muscles. They want to call in “shock and awe” on the Samaritans, smote them with devastating justice.

But Jesus chastens the “Sons of Thunder”... teaching them that they are being trained for a different sort of task, one that will require them to build up, rather than to destroy, to forgive, rather than to condemn, to love, rather than to hurt.

DISCIPLESHIP:

Jesus' training regimen is indeed off-kilter and not of this world.

We see that in the second part of the Gospel where, in a series of three encounters, Jesus explains the difficulty of following him. In all three training sessions, the prospective disciple... fails.

You would think that, since the trainees have an eagerness and a willingness to do God's work, they would be Jesus' top choices in the journey to Jerusalem.

Instead, Jesus discourages their efforts by calling the nature of their discipleship into question. Jesus has no time for burying parents or even saying goodbye.

Offered up in “staccato fashion” (boom-boom-boom), these stories shock our senses.² Jesus is so tough on them that the training montage comes to a bit of a sour end, with dissatisfied and rebuked disciples. They are not pumped and primed for the journey to Jerusalem but rather cut down to size and humbled, or perhaps so discouraged as to give up the whole thing all together.

CALL:

It's interesting that Luke is careful not to name those three would-be disciples.

Instead, we are left wondering “where do I fit in?” Which one of *those...* is *me*?”

As we read the passage, you might be asking “Could I leave my family?”

“Could I leave without saying goodbye?”

“Would I give up all *this* for Jesus' sake?”

² Green, Joel B. 2014. *The Gospel of Luke*. (NICNT Commentary) Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 402.

Do I have what it takes?

Luke leaves it up to us to how we would respond in this situation.

This is the type of passage that makes preacher and congregant nervous alike; this sudden appearance of “mean Jesus.”

It took me aback so I looked back 3 years ago to see what I preached on when this lesson was read then. I was new to you, and vice versa, I preached the importance of rest and Sabbath. My sense then was that St. Timothy’s had been through so much with COVID and interims that this was a particularly difficult word to hear that Summer of 2022.

I want to say the same thing now, despite Jesus’ tough words, because our common life in the community is still difficult, more so even. It’s exhausting and we need rest and comfort from the stress and pressures of simply being alive. Likewise, our church life can sometimes be the same.

So I want to preach rest and Sabbath again, knowing when to step back, when to refill your cup. Maybe we should peer back into the *Old Testament* lesson and find that the lectionary seems to be at cross-purposes. There Elijah *allows* his disciple Elish the gift of going back to his family.

JESUS:

Still Jesus beckons and calls to us, in this passage, almost like an annoying Peloton instructor who won’t take no for an answer. A George Patton type that demands excellence in everything that you do.

I think that Jesus is a brilliant teacher because he knows, so to speak, the training regimen for all of us, how our journeys with Christ will be different than the person sitting next to us.

Jesus knows when to pull and when to push, when to show mercy and when to say “buckle up.” Think of all the different personalities among the disciples that Jesus had to manage.

I don’t think that Jesus wants us to lose our identity.

or who we are as Children of God in the process of our call and discipleship, only that we follow him.

In the words of one preacher “(Jesus) calls us not to slavish imitation but to follow—each of us in the context of his time and place.” And, thanks be to God,

“There is no time or place or circumstance where one cannot follow.”³

The good news is that we are not being called as automatons in a spreadsheet for God’s work but rather as a unique, beloved, flawed, individuals made in the *imago dei* with a specific purpose for God’s collective plan.

Famously, Luke in his Gospel, softens Jesus’ command: “Pick up your cross and follow me”; changing it to “Pick up your cross daily and follow me.”⁴

Luke changes it because maybe he has an understanding of the diversity of God’s gifts, of the diversity of vocations and calling. Maybe he understands that we don’t want James and John in charge of church membership, or Peter in charge of our strategic planning or Charles singing soprano in the choir, or what have you.

This week, I spent some time reflecting on this passage, and I promise that is how my thought process went, I was thinking about how there are some of us who get their names up in the lights, like the named disciples. who succeed and fail, whose lives are judged accordingly

Then I thought about there are so many who answer the call, who carry the Cross, who walk the Way, who live out Spirit-filled lives, but are nameless like those in our story.

I thought specifically (maybe it’s because I have just come from visiting family!) about all those who take care of loved ones, who care for the elderly, who quit their jobs, cut back on hours, change their living arrangements, move 1000s of miles to take care of Mom and Dad.

They deserve something, some kudos, some applause, maybe a tax break, at least they deserve an “atta boy/ girl” from the Church.

Have you noticed the great irony there?

That taking care of dying parents is the exact thing that Jesus seems to be critiquing. That... strangely... that dynamic is the razor’s edge of competing goods that Jesus decides to employ as a teaching lesson.

I am okay with leaving that thought in tension because Jesus will keep guiding us as we wrestle with, along the way, Jesus will train us, you and me, in ways obvious

³ Ernest T. Campbell “Follow Me.” in Long, Thomas G., and Cornelius Plantinga, eds. 1994. *‘A Chorus of Witnesses’: Model Sermons for Today’s Preacher*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans. 168-9.

⁴ Mark 8.34; Luke 9.23 (Emphasis added)

and ways not in how to build up his Kingdom, in today's context, and in tomorrow's.

CONCLUSION:

A story to bring us home here, from the church world in a world where our country was dealing with division

After the assassination of John F. Kennedy, a pastor and congregation in Michigan wanted to reach out to Marina Oswald, the widow of Lee Harvey, because they heard she wanted to stay in the United States. After all the logistics were accomplished through the FBI, etc., they were able to move her to Ann Arbor, Michigan, and got her set up with a family in the congregation.

Eventually, word got out and the mail started pouring in to that church.

Some said it was unpatriotic, others that it was unwise.

One woman wrote this, she said she had "belonged to (that) church for 40 years and what it had done for her in all that time... she could write on the back of a postage stamp." And here they were taking care of this family, the 20th century equivalent of Judas Iscariot.

The Pastor of the church answered every letter that he got, including that woman's. He wrote to her and said this: your complaint might be true: BUT "The one thing you haven't shown us is what we have done is unlike Christ."⁵ That we have failed to answer when he said 'come and follow me.'

Maybe we can respond to this passage in this way:

Because of God's love for us, we now have the freedom to lose our possessions, the freedom to love outside our comfort zones, the freedom to maintain our identity in Christ above all.

The good news is that it imparts to us with great responsibility because Jesus is calling all of us, to follow him, to be trained, to fall down and get back up, where we will all be given an opportunity to make a testimony, to strike out on this journey, to walk in Jesus' footsteps and learn from him.

AMEN

⁵ Ernest T. Campbell "Follow Me." Long, Thomas G., and Cornelius Plantinga. 1994. *A Chorus of Witnesses: Model Sermons for Today's Preacher*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans. 169; <https://www.nytimes.com/1964/12/24/archives/oswalds-widow-to-study-english.html>; https://aadl.org/sites/default/files/aa_news/aa_news_19641223-marina_oswald_to_study_english_at_um.jpg