

Sermon for Pride Sunday, June 29, 2025

St. Luke/San Lucas Episcopal Church

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14; Psalm 77:1-2,11-20; Galatians 5:1,13-25; Luke 9:51-62

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer. Amen.

I appreciate this prayer particularly this morning, as the Gospel for today is rather challenging. So, with the help of the Spirit, let's dig in.

In first century Palestine, Jesus began his ministry in the countryside, teaching, preaching, healing, gathering his disciples, caring for his followers, praying about his future. He had begun to attract attention—and not always positive attention—from the people, from the religious authorities, from the Roman imperial leaders.

Jesus work with marginalized populations, including the Samaritans. Samaritans were considered odd, different, outside the mainstream. While some saw them as a renegade sect of Judaism, others considered them heretics. Rather than worshiping at the temple in Jerusalem, the Samaritans followed older practices, worshiping God “in the high places.” Their holy sites where they built altars and held ceremonial services, were some of the same places that Abraham, Jacob, Joseph and others used for their worship, before the temple was constructed.

As Jesus was taking his last trip to Jerusalem, knowing what he would be facing there, he and his group passed through the region of Samaria. Some of his disciples went ahead into a village to prepare a place for them to stay. According to Luke, the villagers did not receive Jesus, “because his face was set toward Jerusalem.”

We don't have all the details, but there are a few possibilities that could explain why the local authorities wouldn't welcome an overnight visit from Jesus. Maybe they were rude, inhospitable, uncaring people who didn't want to welcome strangers into their town.

Or maybe, perhaps, something else was going on. Remember that, during this period, there was a lot of tension between inhabitants of Samaria and those of the rest of Israel. Perhaps, perhaps when those disciples went ahead into the town, they carried with them some of that attitude Perhaps they were a bit arrogant, entitled even. Perhaps they alienated the local authorities with their approach, their manners, making themselves unwelcome.

Or, perhaps, perhaps the Samaritans were aware that Jesus was already under suspicion by the Roman authorities. It could be that they didn't want to be seen as co-conspirators. Perhaps they didn't want to bring the attention of the Romans onto their town, their families, particularly given the known brutality of the Roman empire toward those who challenged them.

Or, maybe, just maybe, the Samaritans in that town were aware of Jesus' ministry, of the teachings and healings he had performed. Perhaps they had heard that he was coming to their little town, and had made preparations. Gathered together all those in their community in need of healing, all those with questions, those in need of guidance, or direction. Only to be informed by the disciples that come ahead that Jesus wouldn't be doing any teachings, any healings, that he was just traveling through, with his face already turned toward Jerusalem. And in their disappointment, in their knowledge that having Jesus in town without any miracles could cause those gathered to protest, to riot. Under those circumstances, the local Samaritan authorities might very well have asked the disciples to travel on.

We don't know for sure why the Samaritans in that particular town didn't roll out the red carpet for Jesus and his entourage. But we do know what came after.

James and John saw that they, and Jesus, were not welcomed. They became enraged on Jesus', and perhaps on their own, behalf. They asked him, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"

Can't you just picture it, two disciples, sure of their own privileged position, convinced they were right, filled with power, practically chomping at the bit to unleash revenge, destruction, fire and brimstone, on those who, in their view, had insulted their leader, thereby proving their own loyalty, demonstrating their own superiority. I'm sure they were expecting Jesus to say, Go for it. Let's see you use those powers. Drop those bombs. Burn it all to the ground.

Instead, Jesus turned to them and rebuked them. Instead of praise, they received a rebuke, public correction. That must have stung.

Now, why would Jesus do this? What would cause Jesus to rebuke his disciples when they were just trying to defend him? This seemed like an interesting response from Jesus, and it made me curious. Who did Jesus rebuke? When did Jesus rebuke? Why did Jesus rebuke?

So, I took a look at Jesus' use of public correction. At the times in the New Testament that Jesus is said to have "rebuked" something or someone. It actually didn't happen often, but there are a few instances recorded.

Jesus is said to have rebuked the wind and the waves, calming the sea. He also rebuked demons, casting them out of those whom they had been inhabiting and torturing. In both cases, Jesus rebuked non-humans in order to protect, to heal, to care for humans around him.

When we look at those people whom Jesus rebukes, we find that they tend to fall into two camps—the disciples, those who were in training to be religious leaders, and the Pharisees, the current religious authorities of the land. Jesus rebukes those with authority, particularly those who put themselves up as speaking in the name of God.

Jesus rebukes, publicly calls out, corrects, those who are leading others astray, who are using, or misusing, their power and authority, who stood in the way of others' trying to have a relationship with God.

Jesus reserves his harshest words, his most fierce responses, not for sinners, not for criminals or the marginalized, but for those who have power and are acting without empathy, without justice, without understanding. Who are preventing others from knowing God.

And in each case, Jesus follows his rebuke with a teaching, a lesson in what we should do, how we should act, who we should be.

So, what can we learn from this Gospel, from Jesus' interaction with, his rebuke of, his disciples. What can we take from this to apply to our own lives?

Today we celebrate Pride Sunday, to appreciate the contributions of our queer siblings in Christ. As an open, affirming denomination, we are proud of this approach, of the fact that, for almost 50 years, members of the LGBTQIA+ community have been accepted as full members of our congregations.

Yet, I wonder, I wonder. How often have we treated out queer siblings as Samaritans, people who are formally part of our community but who are different, who don't do things the way we do. How often are our queer colleagues accepted but not affirmed, tolerated but not celebrated. How often do we, like the disciples, look for a way to exclude, rather than welcome? We may not be calling down fire from heaven, but are we respecting the dignity of every human person?

Perhaps we, like the disciples, need to heed Jesus' teachings. Perhaps we also need to listen, to learn, to change the way we do business in order to fully include all. As the parent of a queer child, I realized a while ago that I needed instruction. At times I needed correction. The way I had been raised, the language I used, what I thought of as "normal," all needed to be rethought, adjusted, changed. At times, I needed to be rebuked, to be caught up short, in order to see how my actions, my words, were hurting others.

Learning, changing, transforming is a process. It requires an openness. It requires a willingness to listen, really listen, to members of the queer community. To study, to read works written by queer authors, to see movies made from their perspective, using their voices, to accept that, as much as I care, I can never fully understand, because I do not walk that path, in those shoes.

And that, because of that, I need to learn from others, to be ready to apologize for things that I have done, for words that I have used, that are hurtful. That I need to adjust my pronoun usage, my language, in order to be more inclusive. That I need to consider how policies work, not just for traditional families, but also for the more diverse families we now have among us.

And as a church, we are also still in the process of transformation. Even though it's been nearly 50 years since the Episcopal Church took the decision to be open and affirming, we still have work to do. There are still policies and practices that can be improved. There are still people who don't feel welcome, who are not welcomed, into our space.

So, as we celebrate Pride, let us also celebrate, not just accept, not just tolerate, but celebrate, all members of our community, our LGBTQIA+ members, our straight members, our searching members. Let us listen to Jesus' words, to love our neighbors as ourselves.

I'd like to close with a prayer, written by Rev. Elizabeth Riley, a priest in our diocese. Let us pray:

Author of the universe—
Your creation has always existed within a complex beauty,
Reflecting the multifaceted nature of your very being,
Manifested so beautifully within humanity.

May our knowledge of you demand we
Know and see the reflection of your divinity
In all expressions of love, in all expressions of identity.

Unburden us from artificial restraints and definitions
That have only ever served to limit us.
Invite us into the full knowing of your holy creation
In all genders, in all expressions,
In all bonds of love, in all ways of being.

Renew our commitment to transforming the world,
Keep fast our hope in a future more loving and more diverse than we know,
Strengthen us that we may never compromise on the dignity and divinity
Of any of Your beloved and holy children.