

## Proper 8C 2016 Sermon

### *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."*

You probably heard or read about it in the news: Pastor Roger Jimenez from Verity Baptist Church in Sacramento told his congregation last Sunday that Christians should be happy about the largest mass shooting in modern history. "The tragedy is that **more** of them didn't die," he said. "...I wish the government would round them all up, put them up against a firing wall, put a firing squad in front of them, and blow their brains out."<sup>1</sup> And lest we think that this one pastor was a singular exception, Pastor Steven Anderson of Faithful Word Baptist Church in Tempe, Arizona said, "The bad news is that a lot of the homos in the bar are still alive..."<sup>2</sup> And Pastor Donnie Romero of Stedfast Baptist Church in Fort Worth told his flock, "I heard on the news today, that there are still several dozen of these queers in ICU and intensive care. And I will pray to God... that God will finish the job that that man started, and he will end their life, and by tomorrow morning they will all be burning in hell..."<sup>3</sup>

Now, all of these pastors claim that they are only saying what God teaches in the Bible. And if these words (which the media loves to print) are all that non-Christians hear about Christianity, and are what non-Christians think the Bible actually says, I wouldn't be surprised if non-Christian nations who don't know any more about Christianity than we know about Islam would assume that this is what **all** Christians believe, and would ban all Christians from entering their countries. At the very least, such hateful words coming out of the mouths of Christian pastors who get a lot of press should cause all of us Christians to pause and consider how each of **us** might respond to this distorted portrayal of our Faith. And it should remind us that if we think there is only one way to read the Bible, we are sorely mistaken.

In today's Gospel, James and John, part of Jesus' inner circle, Apostles of the Church, express a similar desire to wipe off the face of the earth a group of folk who have rejected them.

Jesus has set his face toward Jerusalem. He has sent messengers ahead of him, who enter a Samaritan village, but the villagers will not receive Jesus because his face is set toward Jerusalem. And so James and John respond by asking Jesus, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" And Jesus rebukes them. And not many verses later, he tells the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Professor David Lose asks the question, "Why is it that when James and John meet resistance to Jesus' mission, their first instinct is to call down fire from heaven that will consume those they see as opponents?"<sup>4</sup> And from the examples of pastors responding to the mass murder in Orlando, it seems as though James' and John's "first instinct to destroy those [whom they saw] as opponents" is still alive and well today. "Why is it," Dr. Lose asks, "that when folks resist **our** sense of the way **we** think things should be, we first view them as opponents and then want to remove or even destroy them?"<sup>4</sup> Why is it that when folks resist **our** sense of the way **we** think things should be, we first view them as opponents and then want to remove or even destroy them?

Professor Lose then responds to his own question:

"I'm fond of saying that 'original insecurity comes before original sin,' as I think our existence as mortal, finite, vulnerable beings often scares us into thinking that peace and security come from control. This world is chaotic and dangerous, and there is much of which we are legitimately afraid. Too often, [though], in response to these fears and insecurities, we believe that in order to be safe and prosper we need to **control** *whatever* and *whomever* is around us. And, like children who have never quite grown up, when things don't go our way, we howl with outrage and fear...

"This becomes all the easier when those who are not 'cooperating' with us – that is, don't see things the way we do or do what we want – are different from us. Our tendency to label someone as 'other' – whether in terms of their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, etc. – confers a sinister permission to treat them differently, even to regard them as less than human, or at least less human than we are.

"In recent months, we've seen too much evidence of this penchant... In [the case of the Orlando shooting] it appears it was sexual orientation and ethnicity that made people 'other' in the mind of the aggressor. A year ago in Charleston it was skin color. Nor is this penchant evidenced only in horrific shootings. We see this same tendency to label, exclude, and even remove or destroy in some of the fear-

driven political rallies of this election season and in the call to exclude those who are different from us.

“And we see it in James and John’s reaction to the rejection by the Samaritans: when they feel rebuffed by people they have long believed were less human, or at least less religiously devout, they are ready, even eager, to call fire down from heaven to consume them.

“Jesus rebukes them... Indeed, his whole life and mission are a rebuke of this tendency to solve problems by violence, to define people as different, and to assume that some are ‘**in**’ while others are ‘**out**.’

“Think about it: Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem. There he will be falsely accused, unjustly tried, cruelly treated, and brutally executed. ...Jesus’ response to the chaos, limitation, and vulnerability of this world is not to deny it or try to control it or defeat it, but rather to embrace it...even to the point of death.

“And in response to this One who does not deny *or control*, who does not bring down violence or vengeance upon his enemies, who does not need to take matters into his own hands but relies on God to the end – in response to all this, God raises Jesus from the dead, showing us that there **is** another way. We do **not** need to return hate for hate, we do **not** need to resort to violence out of fear, we do **not** need to control those around us [in order] to flourish.

“So what if... Jesus’ cross and resurrection are less about ‘forgiveness of sin’ in some abstract sense and more about God’s promise to enter into our chaos and fear, stand with us through all that frightens us, remind us that God will not abandon us, and [will] bring us to life on the other side. The antidote to fear, Jesus shows us, isn’t power or weapons or security, it’s courage, compassion, and trust.”<sup>4</sup>

Some news analysts are saying that the British decision to leave the European Union was motivated in large part by fear: fear of immigrants, fear of “the other,” fear that too much influx of those from other cultures might change British culture irretrievably, fear that these “others” would take British jobs. So they voted from a place of inner fear. And the day after the vote, thousands of those who voted “leave” were shocked by what they had done. One voter said: “Even though I voted to leave, this morning I woke up and ... the reality did actually hit me. If I had the opportunity to vote again, it would be to stay.” ( [ITV News](#)) By late Friday, a parliamentary petition had been [launched](#) – and was gathering signatures at the rate of roughly 1,000 names per minute, to hold a second vote. (the [Independent](#)) By this morning, there were over 3 million signatures pleading that they be given a chance to vote again.

Such is what happens when we act from a place of fear.

“James and John,” concludes David Lose, “though urged on the mountain of transfiguration to listen to Jesus, have ignored his mission and ministry and so want immediately to resort to violence. And maybe that’s what creates the sense of urgency that permeates the latter verses of our [Gospel] passage [today]. Recognizing that James and John and the rest have failed to hear his message of love, grace, and forgiveness, Jesus stops talking, sets his face to Jerusalem, and will not let anyone or anything slow him down from getting there in order to show in his own body God’s alternative to the way of the world and God’s validation of love over hate and acceptance over exclusion.”<sup>4</sup>

AMEN

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/06/14/pastor-refuses-to-mourn-orlando-victims-the-tragedy-is-that-more-of-them-didnt-die/>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.ontopmag.com/article/22943/Pastor\\_Steven\\_Anderson\\_Filthy\\_Sodomites\\_Shut\\_Down\\_Anti\\_Gay\\_Churchs\\_PayPal\\_Account](http://www.ontopmag.com/article/22943/Pastor_Steven_Anderson_Filthy_Sodomites_Shut_Down_Anti_Gay_Churchs_PayPal_Account)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.rawstory.com/2016/06/god-will-finish-the-job-texas-pastor-prays-for-injured-orlando-survivors-to-die/>

<sup>4</sup> “God’s Alternative” [http://www.davidlose.net/2016/06/pentecost-6-c-gods-alternative/?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+DavidLose%2FIsqE+%28...In+the+Meantime%29](http://www.davidlose.net/2016/06/pentecost-6-c-gods-alternative/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+DavidLose%2FIsqE+%28...In+the+Meantime%29)