

**The Beginning of a Journey**  
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**Based on 1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21, Luke 9:51 – 62**  
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Both of our passages for this morning contain the beginnings of journey narratives. These narratives are akin to Frodo and Sam preparing for their journey from the Shire to Mount Doom to destroy the One Ring and Everett, Delmar, and Pete from O Brother Where Art Thou in their flight from Parchman Farm to recover the fabled treasure. Or any number of other protagonists from various media forms as they set their faces to a certain task or destination. Some journeys are as clearly laid out as the yellow brick road was for Dorothy. Others start off headed in one direction only to take a major turn along the way, sending the protagonists off in another direction entirely like that of Paul Atreides following his father to their new home on Arrakis, also known as Dune, to later take over as emperor of the known universe.

More pointedly, and closer to home, medical procedures which appear routine might take us on unexpected twists and turns. Political decisions and elections lead communities and nations down paths. Even a simple journey to the grocery store might go from a run to grab one or two items to a full on weeks worth of groceries and we regret having walked instead of having

driven. All of these journeys have a beginning wherein the protagonist must decide whether they will begin this journey or follow a different path.

In the Hebrew Bible text we have the prophet Elijah preparing to conclude his ministry and, in so doing, he selects a protégé, someone to whom he can pass the reigns and will continue the ministry and work. He selects Elisha, a thin haired – and somewhat thin skinned – man who was first encountered working in the fields. Presumably a man from a family with means as his team of oxen consisted of a dozen yoke, we're talking about 24 oxen. Elijah approached and threw his coat over Elisha, signaling that he was selecting the younger man to follow him. Elisha responds by slaughtering the oxen and feeding the people nearby before following after Elijah. A drastic response and one of total commitment to the cause for which the elder prophet has called the younger man. Thus begins the journey of Elisha in dramatic fashion as he is completely devoted to his path, come what may.

As we leap to the Christian Testament reading we have several encounters with individuals who are not quite as committed as Elisha to their calling by another prophet. There are four encounters within the passage which provide individuals or groups an opportunity to follow Jesus as he sets his face on his own journey toward Jerusalem. The first is a group – an entire

Samaritan village – all of whom refuse to admit Jesus and his followers. James and John desire to blow the Samaritans away seemingly forgetting Jesus' teaching earlier in this very chapter of knocking the dust off of villages that do not welcome you. An interesting note on our very human reaction to being rejected.

Luke then presents three individuals, all of whom have their own reasons for hem hawing around and not reacting to the prophet's call as Elisha did to Elijah. Each of these encounters is left somewhat open-ended and we do not actually know how the three individuals react to Jesus's words. The first and third appear to be volunteers, and it could be that the second is as well. They approach Jesus and say that they want to follow and Jesus warns them that the journey may be difficult, this journey will come with difficult decisions, some of which will impact your familial relationships, and this journey demands a level of commitment and seriousness from the follower that reveals that any flippant decision makers will be weeded out quickly.

It is an interesting juxtaposition, the reaction of Elisha compared to the Samaritan villagers. As we look further down the Christian Testament text, it is interesting to consider the severe warnings which Jesus offers to the potential followers. The journey of faith or belief or spiritual practice – whatever

language you would attach to it – is one of difficult and serious decisions, and one which should be taken once one is ready to commit to the work to which a follower of the Christ has been called. To commit to follow Jesus is to commit to learn his teachings, wrestle with his claims, and apply the messages of radical inclusion and provision for those marginalized by the powers that hesitantly invite Jesus into their spheres out of morbid curiosity or to placate their constituents. May we consider our decision to follow this Jesus on his journey, recommit to maintain our work, and refresh ourselves in the face of the warnings which Jesus offered.

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