### St. David’s Episcopal Church

### Beam Blossom, Indiana

### Pentecost 3, Proper 8C

### Sermon by the Rev. Kate Wilson

### June 26, 2022

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

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My dear friends, our readings today are hard ones, with Elisha swearing his loyalty to Elijah as the older prophet travels on his last journey, asking at the end for not just his spirit but for twice his spirit. Was that a sincere compliment and statement of love and admiration, or was it selfish? Then we read Paul’s black and white advice of body versus spirit, which led to extreme forms of asceticism, and disregard for the gifts of our bodies. Without our bodies, how might we comfort a frightened child, or feed a beloved parent? Last, in our Gospel, Jesus tells a potential disciple to let the dead bury the dead and suggests the man stop making weak excuses about his *father,* and follow him. Or forget it. The readings from Second Kings and from Paul’s letter to the Galatians are rich for sermon content themselves, but they are going to have to wait for another day.

That is all hard enough without the week and weeks we have lived. And that’s just in our country. Now, people are able to carry guns in New York despite a more than century-old law restricting guns to those with good and obvious reason to carry a gun: police officers, members of the National Guard, or hunters with licenses. Even then, you wouldn’t carry a gun just any time or anywhere, but when you are on duty or have that license pinned to your sleeve.

And now we have an upheaval of protests in our streets because the Supreme Court has struck down the almost. 50-year precedent of Roe vs. Wade, and attacks on Gay Pride parades and, just last week, a mentally ill man opened fire at a Boomer dinner at St Stephen’s Episcopal Church in suburban Birmingham.

The reaction to the striking down of Roe v Wade was swift and massive throughout the country. As Episcopalians, we know to come to our own beliefs through study of the inspired word in our scriptures, the endless compassion of Jesus, and our own disciplined reason. You have your beliefs, and I have mine. As a church, we lament the pain and fear the ruling has caused, and pray for one another and hold one another in the body of Christ, embracing all others who are suffering as well.

I can embrace our differences but something else set me off. It was the email released by the House of Bishops which I asked Jean to forward to you yesterday. They cited a notice received from Canon C.K. Robertson of the Presiding Bishop’s office stating:

We have received information from federal authorities of credible security threats against clergy and churches around the potential release by the US Supreme Court of its abortion decision,” he wrote. “There is concern that clergy who have advised parishioners about abortion access and their reproductive rights may face threats or violence.

Bishop Jennifer added:

The court’s decision has now arrived, and as leaders of a church that has long supported the right to an abortion [I so wish she had said the right to choose, but it all tumbled on us so suddenly], we must consider the steps necessary to protect our congregations and our people. I am grateful to have a variety of resources we can draw on in this work.

The White House’s Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships recommends the following steps:

And here Bishop Jennifer added several links to the Homeland Security website and another set of links to the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency website.

What on earth? We have to protect ourselves!

This was my tipping point. My less-than-Christian brain took off.

“I’ll take a gun to church. If anyone tries to hurt any of us, they are done!” I have a gun, by the way, to see how difficult it is to get a gun in Indiana and to get licensed, which is not required. The answer to both questions is horrifyingly easy. But now I can write, “I am a gun owner and I strongly support sensible gun laws and a ban of military style weapons.”

The gun is locked and inaccessible unless you know exactly where to look. That’ good. What’s bad is that getting it out was my first thought.

Next was, “We’ll lock all the doors once the service starts. If we see anyone we don’t know, we’ll keep them out. If they’re already in, we’ll tell them to leave. Or we’ll frisk them. If they don’t like it, tough.”

Then I went to the kitchen to make coffee. And to think. Which of my options is the Christian, welcoming with an open-heart option? Which loves my neighbor or, in practice, is acting with kindness, respect, gentleness, and care?

The answer? None of my choices was Christian. None comes from the teaching of Jesus.

Jesus came to his tipping point in the very Gospel we have heard this morning. Just about 20 verses before this segment, Jesus conversed with Moses and Elijah during the Transfiguration. But here he has a sharpened awareness about his work among us. Hie realizes that his journey will end in Jerusalem, and soon. “When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.” Where other stories tell of Moses or Elijah setting their faces, it has meant that they assume a determined look.

The New International Version of the Bible words it a bit more clearly:
As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

Jesus knew what would happen in Jerusalem. This is his tipping point. He shifts from teaching and miracles to moving to closure of his ministry. I suspect time became much more precious to him. If he had ever coddled his followers, those days were at an end. At least for now.

And so Jesus comes to Samaria. Samaria sat smack dab in the middle of Jesus’s journey from Galilee in the north to Jerusalem in the south. Jews and Samaritans despised one another, and violence often erupted. Rather than facing danger, travelers crossed the Jordan River north of Samaria, traveled through the Transjordan, and recrossed the Jordan once Samaria had been cleared.

Why did the two groups despise one another so viciously? Samaritans were an ethnic mix between pagans and Jews. They ascribed to only the first five books of the Hebrew bible and followed some of their pagan ancestors’ practices. Samaritans believed God resided on Mount Gerizim, not on Mount Zion where the gleaming Temple had been built. There was no good reason to travel to Jerusalem.

Despite the history – or perhaps because of it – Jesus ordered the band through Samaria. He was not giving up on the Samaritans, nor would his apostles, in time. Remember the Samaritan woman who exclaimed that Jesus knew everything she had ever done? She brought disciples to Jesus, and he was not about to write that entire nation off. This time, though, the Samaritans did not extend hospitality and James and John went absolutely ballistic. They remind me of someone I know who considered bringing a gun to St. David’s. Jesus had the same answer for them that he had for me: No. Is that clear enough? What have I taught you? The disciples went on to another village at Jesus’s direction, and so too did I move on to a better idea. A Jesus idea.

Jesus next meets three potential disciples. His mind is on Jerusalem. His virtual clock is ticking. He doesn’t mince words: Salvation is hard work. If you want to be homeless, as I am homeless, depending on hospitality you can never depend on, you’re in the right place. James and John know exactly what depending on hospitality means; their meal was delayed if they even had a meal that night, because the Samaritans were having none of them. We are left wondering what the hopeful man’s decision was. To join? To go home to a hot meal? We’ll never know.

Jesus is approached again. Jesus’s answer? “Let the dead bury their own dead.” That is so very harsh to our ears as it surely was to this potential novice. Jews took the commandment to honor their parents seriously. Now, the burial rites at the time might not have ended with the burial within 24 hours we are aware of. The extended rites may not have allowed the man to drop his obligations and follow Jesus on Jesus’s timetable. Still, there is no negotiation here. Finally, a third disciple-to-be made the same ask, contingent on saying goodbye to his family. It’s ironic that when Elisha had asked Elijah for the same dispensation, Elijah granted it and the younger man took loving leave from his family. Jesus, however, was not in a position to wait.

We don’t know if any of the three went with Jesus despite the sacrifice or if they left, defeated and perhaps even disillusioned. We do know that Jesus established two truths: one, that following him should be our first priority, sometimes making it our only priority. And second, that following him and living from love should guide all our other priorities and decisions.

Doing so is as difficult now as it was then, perhaps even more difficult as our culture is so much larger and we are bound by so many demands. We have vows, contracts, legal responsibilities. We aren’t all single and we can’t take our tent-making business on the road as Paul did. Still, our baptismal vows and our spoken claims of being Christians must guide our actions. That is why I will never carry a gun under the guise of protecting others from “the bad guys”. That is why I will challenge myself **and** you to be sure our doors are open and our welcome comes from the depths of our souls. That is why I pray for our enemies and will use peaceful means of protest when my prayerful consideration says I must act, as our freedoms are threatened. That is why I want us all to be the light in this very dark, strange, un-Christlike world. I want us to be bearers of love among hate, of peace within turmoil. That is Jesus’s way, and time is of the essence. And, oh, I have registered for that Homeland Securrity webinar this coming Wednesday.

I’d like to end with a poem by Mary Oliver entitled “The Buddha’s Last Instruction”. Let it help us remember Jesus’s way, and the universality of being light bearers.

The Buddha’s Last Instruction

"Make of yourself a light"
said the Buddha,
before he died.
I think of this every morning
as the east begins
to tear off its many clouds
of darkness, to send up the first
signal-a white fan
streaked with pink and violet,
even green.
An old man, he lay down
between two sala trees,
and he might have said anything,
knowing it was his final hour.
The light burns upward,
it thickens and settles over the fields.
Around him, the villagers gathered
and stretched forward to listen.
Even before the sun itself
hangs, disattached, in the blue air,
I am touched everywhere
by its ocean of yellow waves.
No doubt he thought of everything
that had happened in his difficult life.
And then I feel the sun itself
as it blazes over the hills,
like a million flowers on fire-
clearly I'm not needed,
yet I feel myself turning
into something of inexplicable value.
Slowly, beneath the branches,
he raised his head.
He looked into the faces of that frightened crowd.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Let us turn ourselves into souls of inexplicable value, bear the light of Christ in this dark world, spread his peace in this storm, and overflow with his compassion for the suffering.

1. Mary Oliver, 1990, In *New and Selected Poems, Volume 1.* Beacon Press, Boston © 1992 by Mary Oliver [↑](#footnote-ref-2)