



June 26, 2022

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God. Luke 9:11



Dear Friends,

A woman was walking along a forest trail. She stumbles and falls over the edge of a precipice. As she falls, she grabs onto a tree sticking out of the face of the cliff. She is hanging by one arm since her other arm was injured in the fall. She is hanging on for dear life. She is praying in desperation and calling out to God to save her. Just then the voice of God responds. *"Jane, this is God. I have heard your prayer. Trust me."* Then the voice of God says, *"Let go, I will catch you."* Jane calls out loudly, *"Is there anyone else up there who can help me!"*

There are moments in life that demand that we decide and follow a path. We cannot keep looking back and second guessing ourselves. Otherwise, we risk going nowhere frozen in our indecision. The call to follow Jesus is just such a moment. If we are going to follow Jesus, we must let go of those things that keep us from going all the way.

In the Gospel reading Jesus is making his last journey to Jerusalem. There he will be arrested and crucified. Yet he is determined to fulfill the will of God. The quickest way from Galilee to Jerusalem takes the traveler through Samaria. Now the Jewish people and the Samaritans had a common beginning in ancient Israel. But after King Solomon the kingdom is divided between north and south. The north became the Kingdom of Israel the south became the Kingdom of Judah.

While they had much in common their histories diverge, and polarization grows. By the time of Jesus there was over seven hundred years of enmity that had developed into open hostilities. Many Jewish people would rather walk the long way around from Galilee to Jerusalem and get there by way of the Jordan Valley. It was a typical reaction for the Samaritans not to welcome Jesus and the disciples since they were headed to Jerusalem. After all the Samaritans had their own shrine to the Lord (Yahweh) in Shechem.

And the Jewish disciples of Jesus typically respond with wishing a curse on the Samaritans. But Jesus rejects the "eye for an eye" mentality. Jesus in Luke will work to reconcile Jews and Samaritans. Jesus tells the story of the "Good Samaritan" which is only found in Luke. And in the Acts of the Apostles (written by the same author as Luke) shows how Jews and Samaritans become reconciled in the community of the Risen Christ.

The only way reconciliation works between groups hostile to each other is to admit past failure but then look to a new future. Jesus tells us we can't look back when we follow him on the path to peace and reconciliation. He uses an earthy image. He tells us when you put your hand to the plow you can't look back. Why? If you keep looking back the oxen won't keep a straight line and the furrows for your crops will be crooked making it very difficult to efficiently irrigate the fields.

If we are to plow our way to the peace of the Kingdom, we can't keep nurturing the grudges of the past. We look to a new relationship with those from whom we have been estranged. There is still much polarization in our country. There are divisions of class, race, education, gender, urban centers and dying rural counties. The unscrupulous exacerbate our divisions to their personal advantage. However, what benefits the selfish few will tear the rest of us apart.

The challenge of Jesus is to let go. Follow the difficult path that leads from the cross to new life. Let us stop calling fire down from heaven on those with whom we disagree. Let us assume those with whom we disagree have legitimate concerns just as we have. Let us listen with open hearts. Let us seek not to win an argument but to gain a friend, brother or sister. Then we will find ourselves on the path that leads to life.

Peace,

Fr Ron

Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: www.anne.church