

Triage
[Luke 9:51-62](#)
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When you become a parent, you have to very quickly learn how to handle an emergency, and the more children you have, the more you need to be prepared to handle multiple emergencies at the same time. Every so often, things just kind of spiral out of control, and you need to have some kind of plan for what you are going to do when they do, a plan for every possible contingency. Someone who is crying is important to deal with, but someone who is bleeding is more important, and something that is on fire is most important of all – if all three are happening at the same time, you put out the fire first, then stop the bleeding, then deal with the tears afterwards. This is called triage, and we all do it all the time – when we're faced with a set of problems, we need to figure out which one is the most urgent, even when it's something as simple as cleaning up the house – you decide on whether to tackle the laundry or the dishes first based on how soon lunch is and how many clean forks you have. In hospital emergency rooms, every patient who comes in is dealt with, not in the order that they arrive, but based on how urgent they need care – a broken leg is a big deal, but it won't get worse if you wait for an hour while they help the guy having a heart attack. Doing triage doesn't mean that the problems aren't unimportant, that they don't need to be dealt with – it just means they can wait while you take care of something else first.

And we can see this happening in our scripture reading from the gospel of Luke this morning. Here we see Jesus and his disciples setting out on a journey, but all along that journey they are beset by a series of problems, troubles, challenges, one after another, things keep going wrong. First, they come to a village of Samaritans that refuses to welcome them. And we need to understand that this is a major violation of the cultural standards of the day. Travelling through the countryside was a dangerous thing to do back then – there were all kinds of dangers that could befall you, bandits lurking in the shadows, accidental falls, wild animals, Roman soldiers who could press you into service to carry their gear for them, all sorts of things could go wrong when you travelled from village to village across first century Palestine. So there was an understanding that when a traveller reached a village, they would extend hospitality to you, no matter who you were, there was an obligation to take you in and feed you and give you a safe place to stay. In this world, there are no hotels, no fast food restaurants, no gas stations for quick supplies – every traveller is depending on the kindness and hospitality of the villages they enter on their journey to make sure they reach their destination safely. So when these Samaritans decide not to welcome Jesus and his disciples, they aren't just being rude. They're throwing out all the agreed social norms, all the rules this society is built on are being tossed in the trash. And this puts Jesus and his disciples in some danger – if this town won't take them in, they will need to keep walking to the next town, and it might be some distance away. It might mean travelling at night, hungry and tired, vulnerable and exposed. The consequences of this village's lack of hospitality could be deadly. This is a problem, a problem you would think

that Jesus would address, with a sermon maybe, or a parable, or at the very least a sternly worded letter to the local chamber of commerce. But Jesus doesn't do that. Jesus doesn't deal with this problem. Jesus keeps walking.

Of course, the disciples aren't so patient, and this causes the second problem for Jesus on his journey. The disciples understand what a cruel act of callous indifference these Samaritans are guilty of, and they are not content to just keep walking. They are not content to write a sternly worded letter to the local chamber of commerce. They want justice. They want revenge. They want Jesus to use some of that power that he's got to call down fire from heaven to burn that village and everyone in it to a crisp. And of course, we read this and see this as a bit of an overreaction, but you can understand why the disciples are upset. This village has put them in danger, forcing them to keep walking on empty stomachs well into the evening, risking bandits and lions and all the other dangers of the road, and they want Jesus to retaliate against the village, call down God's justice and fury in fiery form. And again, this is a problem. You would think that Jesus would use this as an opportunity to teach his disciples about forgiveness and patience – you'd expect a sermon, a parable, you'd expect him to slowly spell out to his twelve apprentices that No, friends, we do not use fire to destroy people who inconvenience us, that's not how it's done. But Jesus doesn't do that. He rebukes them – tells them to cut it out – but that's it. Jesus doesn't deal with this problem. Jesus keeps walking.

And then, after this incident in Samaria, we have three encounters on the road with three different people who all want to follow Jesus, they all want to become Jesus' disciples, but there's just one thing they need to take care of. The first one seems ready to follow, but Jesus warns him that the road he'll be taking isn't an easy one – it will be filled with challenge and trouble and pain, and he'll have to get used to living rough and sleeping on the road. The second man wants to follow, but first he needs to hold his father's funeral, which seems like a completely reasonable request, but Jesus has no time to wait. And the third man is just asking for a chance to say goodbye to his family – just take a little detour past his house so he can tell his wife and kids not to wait up for him, but Jesus won't even give him time for a brief goodbye. These three men want to follow Jesus, they want to be disciples, but they just have these tiny little problems that they need to solve first, but Jesus doesn't deal with their problems. Jesus just keeps walking.

And that seems pretty surprising, right? We're so used to hearing about loving, kind, friendly Jesus, gentle Jesus, meek and mild, Jesus who told his disciples that if someone asks you to walk one mile with them, you should go with them two, if they ask for your shirt, give them your coat as well, and here people are asking Jesus for just a little delay so they can deal with these very small problems, and Jesus isn't willing to wait. Jesus isn't willing to help. If you told Jesus that your father had just died, you'd expect him to stop, and give you a hug, and tell you that hey buddy, it's going to be okay, we'll get through this together, and now lets go put the tea on and make the little sandwiches and make this the best darn funeral this town has

ever seen, and then I'll bring him back to life. That's what you expect from Jesus. You don't expect him to say, "Father Schmather. Who cares! People die all the time! The Jesus train can't be stopped, so either get on board, or get out of the way! Choo Choo!" It's surprising. It's not what we expect from Jesus.

So if we're going to understand why Jesus seems willing to ignore all these problems he's encountering, we need to understand what is really happening in this chapter. At the beginning of this chapter, right before our reading starts, Jesus goes up a mountain with Peter and James and John, and there he is transfigured, he enters into God's presence and speaks to God face to face. He meets with Moses and Elijah, the greatest prophets who ever lived, and Jesus talks with them about what is about to happen to him in Jerusalem. And before and after he comes down the mountain, Jesus tells his disciples that he is going to Jerusalem to die – in Jerusalem, he will give his life on the cross, so that everyone who follows him will have everlasting life, everyone who loses their life will save it, and his disciples will see the kingdom of God coming here in the world. And after telling his disciples what he is doing and where he is going, then Jesus turns and sets his face towards Jerusalem. Jesus knows what he needs to do. He knows where he is going, and he knows what will happen to him when he gets there. He knows that this act of sacrifice, this willingness to lay down his life for the sake of humanity, this will be the moment that will change human history forever, and he knows that nothing in the universe is more important than this journey to Jerusalem and what he will accomplish there. And as soon as he sets out on this journey, with his face set towards Jerusalem, all of a sudden all these little problems start coming up, trying

to pull him away from the path he knows he must follow, trying to lead him back to his old ministry, doing miracles and helping people and solving problems everywhere he goes. So when Jesus doesn't solve the problems he encounters on the road – when he keeps walking, refusing to take time for a funeral or a family farewell, Jesus isn't saying that these problems aren't important. They are important. They're just not urgent. Jesus is doing triage, he's looking at all the work he needs to do, and he knows that the most important thing he can do for all these troubled, broken human beings he meets on the road, is to keep walking towards Jerusalem. Keep walking to the cross. The other problems can wait, but the cross can't wait, and that's where Jesus is headed, and he won't let anything stand in his way.

But that doesn't mean that these people are left on their own forever. As soon as Jesus is raised from the dead, as soon as he has blessed his disciples with the fire of the Holy Spirit that transforms them into the church, Jesus sends them back out from Jerusalem, back on the road to Samaria, to Galilee, to the ends of the earth. And that means that all these people who stayed behind, who missed their chance to follow here because they had other things to do, other problems to worry about, the church would one day come back down that same road, this time filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, ready to invite all these half-hearted, uncertain followers to come and follow Jesus Christ again, come and discover what he had accomplished for them in Jerusalem, come and join in the kingdom of God. When the church came back down the road to that same Samaritan village, they brought fire from heaven, but not fire that destroys, the fire of the Holy Spirit that brings

everlasting life. Jesus Christ went to the cross because he knew: that was where he was meant to go, that was the urgent problem his Father had called him to face, and he would not let anything else stand in his way, so that through the power of his Holy Spirit at work in the church, every problem, every challenge, every trouble could be healed and restored and made right, once and for all.

And I think we need to remember this, as disciples of Jesus Christ, as those who have been called to follow him here and now. All around us, we see all sorts of problems, all kinds of trouble in our world that we want healed. We read about war and violence and poverty and hunger, in far away countries and so close to home, and we want to fix what is broken in our world, we want to take on the villains and the bullies wherever we can find them, we want to call down fire from heaven on our enemies and bring comfort and healing to our friends, and yet there is so much to do, and we feel so weak, so helpless, unable to solve even the troubles we face in our own lives, let alone the world. There are so many problems to solve, it can feel overwhelming, just trying to figure out where to start. But the truth is, we don't have to solve every problem. We don't have to heal every wound, win every battle, make every kind of trouble disappear. We are followers of Jesus Christ, and we have his promise that he is still at work in this world – his Holy Spirit is here with us, working in us, and the victory that Jesus won on the cross in Jerusalem is still our victory today. That victory over sin and death, the victory that bridged that gap between heaven and earth, between God and humanity, that victory is still our victory today. Jesus Christ has already defeated our greatest enemy, and his Spirit is at work in this world, bringing light to the darkness, bringing

life out of death, transforming this world to make it piece by piece a part of the kingdom of heaven. Our most urgent problems have already been solved; our most desperate wound has already been healed. And because Christ's spirit is with us now, that means that we can head back on the road from Jerusalem to share what we've received from Jesus Christ. When we know Jesus is working on the big problems, that sets us free to go and meet people where they are – go to the hurting, the lost, the grieving, the hopeless – and start to bring them healing and life, sharing the blessings we've been given, binding up their wounds. We don't have to solve every problem. We don't need to fix all the brokenness around us. We can trust that Jesus is at work on everything that is too big for us to handle, and then we can start with the people right in front of us, the people God wants us to love and serve and lift up into life. Because Jesus walked the road to Jerusalem for our sakes, we can walk on the road away from Jerusalem for his sake, bringing his life and light and love to the furthest ends of the earth, sharing everything we've been given with everyone we meet so they can know what we know – Jesus is with us, and there is no problem he can't handle, no brokenness he can't heal, nothing in all creation that can keep us apart from his everlasting love. In the name of Jesus Christ – Amen.