

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, July 19, 2022
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“Sons of Thunder”

READING: Luke 9:51-56 – As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set his face toward Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to destroy them?” But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and he and his disciples went to another village.

You have to chuckle at this reading, don’t you? James and John, the sons of Zebedee, are quite a pair. They see themselves as men of action. They are part of Jesus inner circle. They have already been with him and seen things that the others have not. They were among the first of the disciples to follow Jesus, so they have a sense of priority. They have a pretty high opinion of themselves. I am always reminded of the two brothers in the movie, “Ocean’s Twelve” who are always bickering at each other even as they go about some highly technical chores. I suspect these two did a lot of that, but woe to the person who messed with either one of them for they were tight.

The name Zebedee is best translated “Thunder” thus James and John are the “Sons of Thunder”. These two will later bring their mother to Jesus to ask for special favor when Jesus comes into his kingdom. These two will be with Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration and witness Jesus in his full divinity. And James will become the first of the Apostles to be martyred when Herod Antipas has him killed by the sword. They are important disciples and very dedicated to Jesus. But they have yet a lot to learn about the ways of the Kingdom. They are offended and angered by the Samaritan villagers’ refusal to host Jesus. They don’t have much use for Samaritans to start with. The Jews thought of them as half-breeds and heretics. So for these people to refuse Jesus really got their goat! Their reaction is, “Lord, shall we call down fire from heaven to destroy them?!!” They were going to give them the old “Sodom and Gomorrah treatment” – fire and brimstone. That would teach’em!

Now in the first place, what in the world gives them the idea that they have that kind of power and authority? “Shall we call down fire...?” Who do they think they are? Secondly, what makes them think Jesus would want them to do such a thing? They have journeyed with Jesus a long time by now. They have repeatedly witnessed Jesus in acts of compassion and with a forgiving heart for some of the lowest people in Jewish society and for some of the Gentiles as well. Have they learned nothing? Jesus wouldn’t deal with people in such a harsh and uncaring way, never! And they should have known that.

The Lord of course turns to them and rebukes them. What did they think he was going to do? No star on their foreheads that day. He gives them a look of censure and with a few well-chosen words sets them in their places. That is not the way of the Kingdom. That is not how the Prince of Peace treats those who don’t realize who he is. They should have known that.

We should know it, too. But often we need to be reminded what real Christian actions ought to look like. We see people who dress differently than us – and we judge them. We see people who are immigrants, from a different culture than ours, or who love lots of tattoos – and we judge them. We see people protesting something we see differently – and we judge them. I know most of us do that because I catch myself doing it. I’ve frequently thought, “Someday you’re going to stand before the throne, and you’ll have to give answer for that!” As though I won’t have things to answer for, right? Thanks be to God that he is

giving and forgiving. Not one of us should be ready to cast the first stone. To speak the truth as we know it – yes. But judgment belongs to the Lord.

James and John found the Samaritans wanting and were ready to give them the most dire of consequences. We find ourselves judging others by our standards and find them wanting. If we could, we would teach them a thing or two. Yet, when Jesus came upon those who mistrusted or misunderstood him, he had compassion on them. So much so that he gave himself on the cross for the very people who condemned and derided him. St. Paul says, "...but God shows his own love for us in this – while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!"

While you and I were still sinners – and we still are – he gave himself knowing that.

So when we are offended by the actions, words, or lifestyles we see (and sometimes we will be because others are sinners), let us be slow to judge, slower to condemn, and pray that God will take hold of them with love and mercy and change their hearts. When you are ready to rain the fire from heaven on them, ask yourself first, "What would Jesus do?" Then proceed as he would! Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENT(S): Becky and I are in Ithaca, New York, this week to see where our son Dan and family have settled. I'll let you know what we find there on the next go-around. God bless you.