

Proper 8C
Luke 9:51-62
June 29, 2025

“Nomadic Faith”
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⁵¹ When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. ⁵² And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to prepare for his arrival, ⁵³ but they did not receive him because his face was set toward Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ When his disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” ⁵⁵ But he turned and rebuked them. ⁵⁶ Then they went on to another village.

⁵⁷ As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” ⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” ⁵⁹ To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” ⁶⁰ And Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” ⁶¹ Another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” ⁶² And Jesus said to him, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

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So, I’m glad Jesus told them not to, but is anyone else really taken aback that when a village of Samaritans, sworn enemies of Jewish people, refused to roll out the welcome mat for Jesus and his crew, James and John suggested calling down fire from heaven to consume the village? I get having your feelings hurt because someone doesn’t want you around, but this reaction is a bit extreme, right? Disproportional to the offense? With this kind of emotional dysregulation, it kinda makes me wonder if

Jesus picked the right guys as recruiters. Furthermore, the very fact they thought they *could* call down fire from heaven is itself disturbing. Delusions of grandeur! Glad Jesus set them straight. While I'm sure that he wasn't exactly happy to be rejected by the villagers, he seemed to respect their right to choose not to welcome him. He seemed to respect their agency. While sticking up for the Samaritans, Jesus' words to his disciples that follow couldn't have been easy to receive.

Someone piped up and declared, "I'll follow you anywhere." So Jesus reminded them that following him meant not even having a place to lay down for the night. Someone else said that they needed to bury their father before following him any further. To which Jesus responded, "Let the dead bury the dead. You go to proclaim the kingdom of God." Another spoke up saying they'd follow him, but they needed to tell their people farewell. And Jesus countered that "no one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Harsh words, Jesus. In his own way, he was making it abundantly clear that following him is not like following our favorite podcasters or social media personalities. It takes more than a click. Instead, followers should expect to sleep rough, leave the past behind, and look to the future. Of course, Jesus exaggerates the examples to make his point, but the message is still clear: following him looks like making no more excuses, leaving the past behind, and living into God's good future for the world, wherever it leads, as a nomad. Following Jesus looks like walking by faith.

This whole idea of being spiritual nomads is probably uncomfortable for most of us. We tend to resonate far more with the metaphor of being spiritual pilgrims. I'm guessing that we Congregationalists identify with the pilgrim imagery on account of our separatist forebears and their courageous journey on the Mayflower, from an oppressive land to a "new world." We resonate with their resilience, their vision, and their individualism. Nomads, on the other hand...

One author says that, “[t]o journey without changing is to be a nomad. To change without journeying is to be a chameleon. To journey and to be transformed by the journey is to be a pilgrim.”¹ Clearly, Congregationalists aren’t the only ones with a preference for pilgrims! But the life to which Jesus calls the disciples, lacks one key feature of that of pilgrims—an end point. For both pilgrims and nomads, the journey itself is sacred, but for the pilgrim, there is an end point in mind, an objective, a goal. For the nomad, that simply isn’t the case. The endpoint will be determined by the journey itself. That’s not to say, however, that the nomad’s journey isn’t purposeful, or spirit-guided. Jesus is a perfect case in point. But most of us just don’t like that much ambiguity, uncertainty, or grey area. We’re fine with the journey just as long as we know ahead of time where it’s going to end.

In a way, Jesus gives his followers a target—the kingdom of God or the realm of heaven. Some Christians spiritualize this to be a physical place beyond life, so the metaphor of pilgrims and pilgrimage works. Life is the pilgrimage and the destination is somewhere beyond. But I don’t get that from these particular sayings of Jesus. Jesus taught that the kingdom was coming, was here, was breaking into time and space and breaking through the ranks and trappings of empire. Jesus himself was preparing for it and was calling others to do the same. But it wasn’t a geographical location they were headed for. It wasn’t a place so much as it was a state of being where all is right with the world in divine balance and harmony. Jesus was a nomad, going where the spirit blew and preparing the way for the Kingdom as he understood it. And that’s what he called his followers to do to.

The church, though, with its emphasis on permanence, structure, and tradition, can seem like the antithesis of Jesus’ nomadic faith. I wonder what he would say to us today. I wonder what he would say to New England Congregational Church, located on Aurora’s West Side since 1858 and in our historic building for about 135 years. I wonder what he

¹ Mark Nepo. *The Exquisite Risk: Daring to Live an Authentic Life*, New York: Harmony Books, 2006.

would say to our traditions, my Geneva Gown (out of fashion since the 16th century), our hymns and choir, or time-honored constitution—all trappings of stability, of permanence and place, of a journey ended rather than a journey that's ongoing. Seriously, I wonder...

Then again, maybe he would say the exact same thing to us that he did to those first disciples he called to be nomads with him: "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." You can't live forward and love forward and move forward into the realm of heaven, if you're stuck looking back, and longing back for the past. Instead, as a nomad, be open to the joy and freedom and transformation that can come from following the spirit into God's good future for this church and our world, wherever it leads. May it be so with us. Amen.