

Sermon Notes – June 29, 2025
The Holy Gospel of St. Luke 9: 51-62
Peace Lutheran Church
“Commitment to Mission”

The term “road” (*hodos*, Luke 9: 57) here becomes the designation for the early church in Acts – “the Way” (*hodos*, Acts 9: 2; 18: 25-26; 24: 14; and so on). Jesus' journey into Samaria represents a turning point in his embodiment of this Way. Previously He has been preaching, healing, and calling disciples primarily in Galilee. Now Jesus has “set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9: 51), a three-day journey through Samaria. With the immediacy of the task at hand, Jesus' focus deepens.

This theme of road/way is carried through in each of the Hebrew Scripture readings, including the psalms. The Elijah and Elisha narratives especially find the prophets engaged in transformative journeys. With similar focus, Elijah gives Elisha permission to remain behind, but the latter refuses (2 Kings 2: 2, 6). This contrasts with Elisha's initial reaction to Elijah in 1 Kings 19: 15-21, turning back to bid his parents farewell, an action with which Elijah disagrees but does not forbid. Luke's audience would likely have connected the would-be disciples' replies in Luke 9: 59 and 61 with that of Elijah in 1 Kings 19, especially since alternate manuscripts add a reference to Elijah in Luke 9: 54 (see 2 Kings 1, the events preceding Elijah's assumption).

In each case, the point is not that one may never turn back (indeed, Jesus and His disciples frequently return to their hometown in the beginning of Luke's account) but, rather, that once committed to a course, the way of God requires a disciple to see it through to its completion. Many interpreters even read Jesus' final rebuke in Luke 9: 62 as a later Lukan gloss not original to the tradition. What lies at the root of each of these texts is not a callous abandonment of home and family, but rather a single-minded commitment to God's Way.

Such commitment lies at the root of Elijah's decision to call down fire upon the Samaritans who have forsaken God's way (2 Kings 1: 10) and Jesus' decision to continue onward without distraction (Luke 9: 55-56). Fulfilling God's purpose is of ultimate importance. Although he initially delays, Elisha embodies such commitment by re-purposing his yoke and oxen (1 Kings 19: 21), symbolizing the permanency of his commitment (compare Luke 9: 57), and following Elijah through the village to the end of his journey (2 Kings 2: 1-12). These texts illustrate the fruits of Christian freedom when one remains faithful in God's Way (see Gal. 5: 1-25).