

Travelling to Samaria

[Luke 9:51-62](#)

Following Jesus demands we confront our prejudices.

Recently a bunch of us went to the Abbey on Raymond Island to attend the reconciliation service led by Rev Aunty Phyllis and Rev Kathy. It was my first time to hear Aunty Phyllis's story. For me, what most struck me was Aunty Phyllis's love for white people despite the racism she has faced. Hold that thought while we delve into the passage.



The Journey to Jerusalem

Luke 9:51 says, 'When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. This verse marks the beginning of Luke's 'travel narrative'. Though not speedy, from here on Jesus makes his way towards Jerusalem.

Earlier in chapter 9, Jesus has twice spoken of his suffering, death and resurrection. Firstly, in verse 21 and 22, just after Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Messiah, we read:

He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, saying, 'The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.'

The second time is just after the transfiguration and the healing of the boy with the demon. We read, starting at verse 43: *'While everyone was amazed at all that he was doing, he said to his disciples, 'Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands.'*

But they did not understand this saying; its meaning was concealed from them, so that they could not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.

In setting his face resolutely towards Jerusalem, Jesus knows he is on the path to rejection, suffering and death. Furthermore, to follow Jesus is also to embark on a journey of rejection, suffering and death. It is the way of the cross. The disciples did not understand this. Verse 45 again: 'But they did not understand this saying; its meaning was concealed from them, so that they could not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.'

Note the threefold repetition. They really didn't get it.

They are still full of the excitement of everything that has been happening, still basking in the amazement of the crowds. They aren't wondering what sort of trials they will face in Jerusalem; they are arguing about who will be the greatest when they march in triumph into Jerusalem. And they are badly mistaken. It's not that Jesus hasn't told them.

Verse 23: *"Then he said to them all, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.'"*

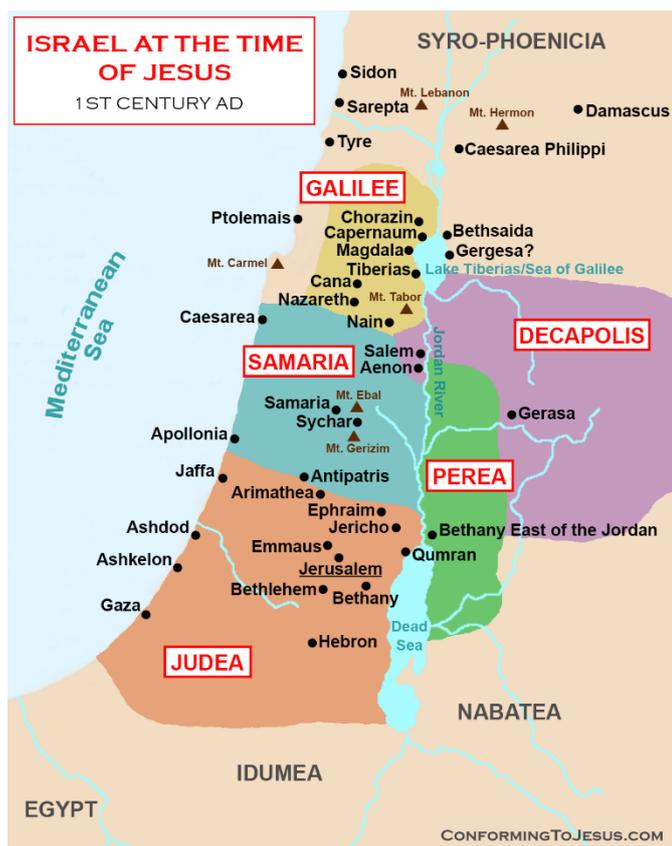
To follow Jesus is the way of the cross and the way of the cross is suffering and death.

Then, in verses 57 to 62, Jesus talks further about what following him entails. It involves being uncomfortable; it involves setting aside the expectations of the family and setting your mind wholeheartedly on the one course. Indeed, it means setting our faces resolutely towards Jerusalem. And Jerusalem is not glory; it is the cross.

First Stop on the Journey: Samaria

Jesus was in Galilee to the north of Samaria and his plan was to lead his followers through Samaria in order to get to Jerusalem in the south. Though the most direct route, good and devout Jews would go around Samaria so as to not have to associate with these people, whom they despised and looked down on as of a lesser class and impure.

For the disciples, at that time, a bunch of Jews who want to impress the important people and gather a following of the right sort in order to enter Jerusalem in glory ... I feel quite sure they would have preferred to go around Samaria. They would take that pious route, cross the Jordan on to the eastern side and travel south that way. They would not go through Samaria.



If a Jew really had to go through Samaria because of time constraints and the need for efficiency, then sure they would go through. But they wouldn't stop.

Jesus, of course, does not just go through. He plans to stop. He plans to receive hospitality from these despised people, to rub shoulders with them and get to know them. Furthermore, he plans to confront his disciples with lesson one in what going to Jerusalem really means and with what the way of the cross means.

I love that short verse in John 4:4, which reads: 'But he had to go through Samaria.' Why? No one else would have. Why did he have to go through there? Why did he have to jeopardise everything? Risk offending people.

Risk derailing what the disciples thought was the mission. Because they were wrong. The mission is the cross. Jesus needed to go to Samaria because he needed to confront the disciples with their racism, their bigotry and their hostility. He needed to lead them on the path of paradigm shift. The cross is the way of breaking down barriers between people. It is the way of inclusion.

To make matters worse, the Samaritans behaved exactly as the disciples expected them to. They rejected Jesus and his followers and treated them badly. Of course, they did. If you

have mistreated and despised a people group for centuries, you can't expect them to receive you with open arms. Hence, I started this morning by talking about Aunty Phyllis. We have no right to expect First Nations people to welcome us and accept us with open arms. We have not earned that trust or respect. Aunty Phyllis, in an act of grace, offers us what we do not deserve. She loves us.

In the normal course, interracial tension becomes an unfortunate cycle. When the Samaritans rejected them, the disciples clearly felt justified in their racism, bigotry and hostility. James and John suggest that maybe fire from heaven to consume them was the right way to proceed. A heavy-handed response to a relatively minor (though admittedly insulting) offense. Maybe not dissimilar to incarcerating a child as young as ten without conviction, having deemed them criminally responsible.

As everyone knows, it is overwhelmingly the First Nations people of this country who are adversely affected by this law. According to Amnesty International: Indigenous children are **locked up at 17 times the rate** of non-Indigenous children, despite making up just 6% of the Australian population aged 10-17. Of all children under 14 imprisoned between 2017-2021, 65% were Indigenous and 68% hadn't even been convicted of any crime. If you would like to sign a petition to raise the age of criminal responsibility, click here:

<https://www.raisetheage.org.au/>

In this season of reconciliation, let us remember that the gospel is not a quaint story about them back then. It is about us right now. To follow Jesus, is to turn our faces resolutely towards Jerusalem. We are not badly mistaken like the disciples. We know how this story ends. But maybe we like to fast forward to resurrection glory and skip over the daily call to take up the cross and address what it demands of us.

If you and I have to go through Samaria, we have to go there. We need to face up to our own darkness. Maybe it's not racism ... In preparing this sermon, I was reflecting on who would be my 'Samaritans' so to speak, those people Jesus needs to lead me amongst. The ones I need to get to know personally in order to challenge my prejudices, my easy dismissal of them and my inward eye-rolling every time such a person crosses my path. Phrased like that, I knew immediately the Samaria Jesus needs to take me through.

With Jesus our Lord, let us set our faces resolutely towards Jerusalem, acknowledging that it is the way of the cross and let us be honest with ourselves, confronting our own prejudices and hostility towards others, as we journey through Samaria.