

1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21
Galatians 5:1, 13-25
Luke 9:51-62

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At age 26, a woman named Cheryl Strayed set out on a journey. With no experience or training, she began to hike more than 1,000 miles of the Pacific Crest Trail, from the Mojave Desert to Washington State. Walking alone in 1995 as a form of therapeutic journey in battling her own demons, she experienced hunger and thirst, loneliness and companionship, terror and pleasure. In starting out, she stated: "I knew that if I allowed fear to overtake me, my journey was doomed. Fear, to a great extent, is born of a story we tell ourselves, and so I chose to tell myself a different story from the one women are told. I decided I was safe. I was strong. I was brave. Nothing could vanquish me." Her journey was dangerous, but she refused to let fear get the upper hand. After completing this long and grueling hike, she wrote the book *Wild*, which was later turned into a movie starring Reese Witherspoon.

There is a connection to today's Gospel reading. Soon after foretelling His death, Jesus embarks on a journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. He knows this trip will be a wild one, ending in death and resurrection. Yet Jesus makes the same decision to journey without fear. Along the way, He instructs the disciples, engages in debates with opponents, speaks in parables and heals the sick. Jesus acknowledges they will face hunger and thirst, loneliness and companionship, terror and pleasure. He warns them how this journey will be difficult, filled with uncertain receptions, going out like lambs in the midst of wolves. Comfort and safety are not guaranteed.

The next village these disciples enter is not hospitable at all. It is a Samaritan town, and the inhabitants are completely unwilling to help travelers journeying to Jerusalem. The disciples James and John go a little wild when they receive this snub, asking Jesus, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" They wanted to drop a nuclear bomb on these unfriendly folks! Jesus rebukes them, having recently told them, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."

How wild it is, this decision to respond to rejection with love. Such a response is sorely needed in our world today, as we engage in religious and cultural debates. Too often we're tempted to react as outraged victims, resenting abuses out of our control. Yet Jesus tells us how we can change the story line with a different agenda, because we have the power to do good, to bravely love, bless and pray for others, even our enemies ... especially our enemies. Instead of attacking people who disagree with us, we just move on. Instead of branding others as evil and calling for God to destroy them, we choose to journey forward as peacemakers with a healing focus. It takes strength and discipline to take discipleship in following Jesus seriously.

You might think this is a "fight or flight" choice, or simply the desire to avoid conflict. Jesus, however, was not afraid to take a stand. He confronted and comforted people in His journey, speaking hard truths, including the cost of discipleship. There will be hostile terrain and predators in the wild. Creaturely comforts will be sacrificed, which sounds like risky behavior.

We likely will start second-guessing our options and level of commitment. Will we stay on course in the race of faith with resolve and purpose? Will disappointing results and undeserved criticisms become painfully distracting?

Discipleship means sacrifice and the elimination of distractions. “No one,” says Jesus, “who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” Do not look back; keep moving forward. Don’t let your daily work or even your affection toward your family get in the way of pursuing the kingdom of God. Again I’m reminded of Cheryl Strayed’s journey, walking a path through the wilderness which challenged, strengthened and ultimately healed her. Her book is subtitled “From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail.”

Jesus wants us all to move from lost to found. A wild journey of faith requires us to walk a tough path with Jesus, stumbling into challenging confrontations, compromising our enthusiasm and determination. As committed as we should be in the stability of our livelihood, family, friends, and causes, don’t let anything prevent you from having a relationship with Jesus Christ. Don’t let earthly fears and resentments prevent you from sharing Heaven’s blessings and healing hope of God’s Word.

Interference and interruptions are normal in faith journeys through life’s wildernesses. Respond with the Fruits of God’s Holy Spirit to prepare the way of Christ’s Kingdom. If you’re not demonstrating love, joy peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control ... you’ve become a part of the wilderness gauntlet in other people’s lives. It’s time to get back on track, to proclaim and share the Kingdom of God as a follower of Jesus. In our own transformation journeys, others may discover the path from lost to found ... in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.