

NO WAY! WAY!

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14

John 14:1-7

Sermon presented by The Rev. Richard D. Raum, at Old First Presbyterian Church,
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Sometimes you reach a place in life so complicated and tough that you can see no way forward, so confining and gloomy you can see no way out, or so hopeless and hard you can see no way up.

This experience of misery isn't a mere modern thing. It was depicted by the Ancient Greeks in the myth of Sisyphus. Sisyphus was punished by the gods for his trickery by being condemned to roll a large rock to the top of a mountain, where the roll would fall all the way back, and he'd have to start over again, ceaselessly, endlessly, his whole life long. The Romans reflected on this experience, as well. Virgil's Aeneas cried out:

I was cast down to the dark, my days dragged by
In misery and I ate my unhappy heart out
In fury . . .

But if the experience of hopelessness is as old as the Ancients, it's also as current as the present. This week's *New Yorker* has a cartoon portraying a man and a woman on a deck overlooking a serene lake. It could be the Adirondacks or Maine. The setting sun shimmers on the water. Mountains rise in the distance. All seems as perfect as it can be. He turns to her and says: "Let's not ruin this moment by enjoying it." We become so hardened to life's complications, so certain that the "other shoe" is going to drop, that we may feel we can't risk enjoying the good times while they last. The singer Beck gives voice to the hopeless "no way-ness" of modern life with the lyric:

There is no one, nothing to see
The night is useless and so are we
Cause everybody knows the fabric of folly
Is fallin' apart at the seams

But such grim expressions of the world's weary wisdom, such as it is, cannot stand-up to the love of God! When we look at our present predicament and complain, "no way," God declares, "way!"

Remember Wayne and Garth, from "Wayne's World"? Mike Myers and Dana Carvey, first as a *Saturday Night Live* sketches, then in movies of their own. "No way." "Way." They weren't making a theological statement, but it may serve to remind us of our relationship with God, We say, "no way." God says, "way." God makes a way out of no way.

Let's turn to the Old Testament passage, and the character Elijah, picking-up where we left-off three weeks ago. Two weeks ago I was on vacation. Last week I preached on matters pertaining to my taking a new ministry position. Today we return to the Elijah narratives, found mostly in the Book of 1 Kings, but also spilling over into the opening chapters of 2 Kings. 2

Kings Chapter two relates a story of Elijah, at the end of his life, facing a situation that appeared to be hopeless, a problem without solution, leaving him “no way” to go.

Elijah and his young disciple Elisha were traveling east from Jericho, probably to the sacred shrine in Gilgal, although the text does not state this, so we don’t know it for sure. But scholars do know that there was an important sanctuary in Gilgal, a center of pilgrimage, and to get there from Jericho would have required crossing the Jordan River. Elijah and Elisha would have known about the river, of course. They no doubt assumed there’d be boats available. Perhaps they’d even arranged for this in advance. But you know how reservations can be sometimes. So there they were, the two of them, Elijah and Elisha, along with 50 others -- students, servants and followers – “standing by the Jordan,” it is written, trying to figure-out what to do next. What had begun with excitement and expectation now seemed cutOff, thwarted and impossible. Finding themselves confronted with this unexpected reality, they could only shake their heads, discouraged, and mutter ”no way.”

But such was not the way of God’s servant Elijah. He trusted God to make a way.

There was once a rabbi, to whom Elijah appeared in a dream one night.

“Elijah,” the rabbi said. “Tell me, is there anyone in this community destined to share in the world to come?”

Elijah brought forth the man Motke, whom the rabbi barely knew, for Motke was not a leader in the community, he was not prosperous, he did not excel in Bible study or even attend services except on the holiest of days. Motke was, in fact, considered a bit of a fool.

“Why this man?” the rabbi asked Elijah. “Why has Motke above all others gained your favor?”

“Because he is a jester,” Elijah said. “When he sees a person sad, he cheers him up. When he hears people quarrel, he makes them laugh. When he finds people struggling to figure out their problems, he encourages them with a word of hope.”

Such was the character of Elijah. No way. Way.

Elijah turned the river problem over to God. It is written:

Then Elijah took his cloak and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them [Elijah and Elisha] crossed on dry ground.

There is an analytic self that may want to subject this story to naturalistic explanations. Was the parting-of-the-waters actually caused by some weather-related or geologic event – a sirocco, or earth tremor? Or is this perhaps a mere folktale, spun to add lively detail to the Elijah stories? Inquiring minds may want to know, but in faith we always engage the Bible first with a pre-theoretic attitude. What is the plain, commonsense meaning of the text? This passage teaches and demonstrates that whatever obstacles, difficulties and barriers a person may come upon in life, so that the only sensible thing to concede is “no way,” God declares, “way.” There is a way across. There is a way through. There is a way to the other side. The great challenge of

faith isn't whether or not God can be trusted to make a way, but whether or not we are willing to trust and take that way, because God's way may be totally unfamiliar to us, and unexpected.

We see God's way most surely and certainly in the way of Jesus Christ, and we take the way of God when we follow Christ. At the Last Supper, which we re-enact and re-experience in spirit here today. Jesus told the disciples to follow in the way of God. But "how can we know that way?" one of them, Thomas, asked. Jesus answered: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." Live as I've lived. Love as I've loved. Be merciful, gentle and kind, as you've seen and heard. Trust God always, and in all things. Obey God's Word. And be in the world as I have been, as one who serves.

So let us come to the Table, rejoicing that the host of this meal, Jesus Christ, is the one who alone is the way for triumphant living in this life, and the way of fellowship with God in the life to come.