

**Brought Home in the Spirit**

June 26, 2022

Luke 9:51-62

<sup>51</sup> When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. <sup>52</sup> And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to prepare for his arrival, <sup>53</sup> but they did not receive him because his face was set toward Jerusalem. <sup>54</sup> 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?" <sup>55</sup> But he turned and rebuked them. <sup>56</sup> Then they went on to another village.

<sup>57</sup> As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." <sup>58</sup> 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." <sup>59</sup> To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." <sup>60</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." <sup>61</sup> Another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." <sup>62</sup> And Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 2:1-14

<sup>1</sup> Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. <sup>2</sup> Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So, they went down to Bethel. <sup>3</sup> The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent."

<sup>4</sup>Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here; for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. <sup>5</sup>The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent."

<sup>6</sup>Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So, the two of them went on. <sup>7</sup>Fifty men of the company of prophets also went and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. <sup>8</sup>Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and the two of them crossed on dry ground.

<sup>9</sup>When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." <sup>10</sup>He responded, "You have asked a hard thing, yet if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." <sup>11</sup>As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. <sup>12</sup>Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

<sup>13</sup>He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. <sup>14</sup>He took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water. He said, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah? Where is he?" He struck the water again, and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha crossed over.



“Brought Home in the Spirit.” “Brought Home.” “Home.”

What do you think of when you hear that word, “home?” In

our two passages, one from the Old Testament and one

from the New Testament, home is the focus. In both we are

invited to think not of home as 411 Walnut Street, or wherever it is that you reside, but

as the place we find community and belonging. While that could be our houses, the

Lord invites us to consider the relationships and commitments we have to the

community of faith and to the larger community around us as the “place” we find

home. And through Elijah, the Lord invites us to consider another home – not so much

a place either, but the meaningful encounters along the journey towards our eternal

home with God. As we explore the idea of being brought home in the spirit today, let

us begin with a word of prayer...

Growing up, I moved a lot. At the time, of course, I didn’t know any different. It was

just the way life was. I was born in Spearfish. When I was

born my parents were teaching in the Lead and Deadwood

schools. But soon my dad switched to the insurance

business. After about a year and a half in Spearfish, we

moved to Rapid City, which was home for about a year and a half. For most of his

career, my dad worked for Traveler’s Insurance Company and for a while it seemed

like they took the name literally. After about three years in two small towns in western

Virginia, we moved to the Miami area. After about two and a half years in Florida, In

third grade we moved again, this time to Enfield, a town north of Hartford, the home

office for Traveler’s Insurance Company.



Then, when I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, we moved to a town closer to Hartford. Glastonbury was where I lived for the longest time to that point. I'd consider that my home for my "growing up" years. The oldest friends that I still have, which are mostly friends on Facebook because we now live in South Dakota, are from my time in Glastonbury.

As for friends or even many memories from Spearfish or early Rapid City or Abingdon or Salem or Miramar – well, I call them "snapshots." I have images or snapshots of friends or places. There are no connections, no relationships. They were stops along the way. Please don't get me wrong. I don't think it was a bad thing, moving a lot. It was simply the way it was for me growing up. My dad and mom worked hard to provide a good life for me and my brother. If I could change it, I honestly wouldn't. As I fell in love and married and eventually settled back in South Dakota, I wanted to set down roots, to find a place to call home. That eventually became Rapid City.

Although we lived in three different homes in Rapid City over our 23 years, there were some things that were constants. For example, when our children started in school, it was at Wilson Elementary. We, and I mostly mean Kristin, fell in love with that school. It was a home for our children and for our family. Looking back, it was probably connected to her upbringing. She went to one elementary school, one junior high school, and one high school. All with the same bunch of kids. So once in Rapid City, when we moved to a new house to accommodate our growing family, we only looked at houses in the Wilson School district. We also went to the same church for all 23 years. So we had the same set of close friends for all 23 years.

Shortly after our first child was born, my parents moved to Rapid City. All three of our children grew up around my parents. There was a real sense of home for us in Rapid City.



Home is something we all value. We all want to have a place where we belong, where we feel safe and secure, where we have roots and connections. Maybe that is why we struggle a little bit with today's text, with Jesus' challenge to those who want to follow him. In the text, they really do want to follow Jesus. But Jesus' definition of home is different than ours. His depiction of arriving sounds more like journeying. We want to settle down, to put our feet up. Jesus calls us to be pilgrims, to be out there as his hands and feet, on the move most of the time. Turn with me to Luke 9 as we work through Jesus' encounters with these three people.

Our passage begins with Jesus on the road. For him, that was home. He has resolutely set his path for Jerusalem. He knows what lies ahead and he is determined to get there, to accomplish his mission. But as the disciples go on ahead to a Samaritan village to prepare a place for Jesus, they are not welcomed. Jerusalem is the destination, not the village. This village will not be home. It is just a stop. So they are not welcomed. Angered by the rejection, James and John ask, "*Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?*" So like the Sons of Thunder! Jesus rebukes them for their question and they just head on to another village. Again, for Jesus, home is not a specific place, but more of a feeling.

As Jesus and the disciples move on, they encounter three people who declare that they want to follow Jesus or are invited to follow Jesus. The first eager follower begins by saying, *“I will follow you wherever you go.”* Maybe he would have been better just saying, *“I will follow you.”* When he adds on the *“wherever you go”* part he is implying there is a destination, an end to the journey. It became about getting somewhere and not about the journey. I think as Christians we can take on this approach at times. We can think we’ve “arrived” – we’ve become a follower of Jesus and we don’t need to keep reading our Bibles, we don’t need to keep growing in our discipleship. We stagnate.

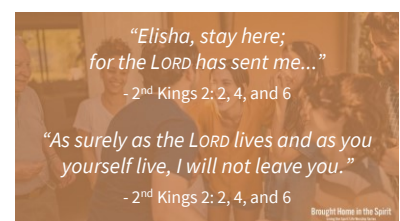
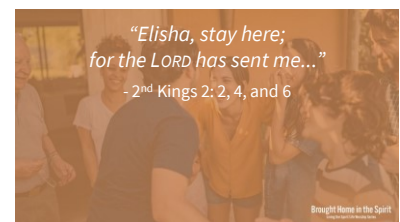
The next two potential followers offer up “buts”. The first wants to go and bury his father and the second wants to go and say goodbye to their family. Both want to follow Jesus but want to stay behind at the same time. Both want to follow but both say they have responsibilities and relationships to care for first. I think we’ve all done this at times because we all have responsibilities and relationships to care for. We’ve all said to Jesus, *“I’ll answer that call that after I...”* or *“I’ll get back to church when...”* or something similar. Yes Jesus, we’ll follow when... We don’t always get our priorities right. When we struggle to do this, I think Jesus would respond to us as he does to these two: *“you go and proclaim the kingdom of God”* and, *“No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”* Jesus asks that our relationship with him be our primary relationship, our first commitment.

Jesus is not asking us not to have any other relationships or to honor any other commitments. That's not his point. He is asking us to establish our relationship and our commitment to him as first and foremost in our lives. Living in and through that relationship with Christ, we can then love and serve others in deeper and stronger ways. When we journey together with Christ at our center, we create home wherever two or more gather in his name. It is not a place, but the journey together.

Turn with me to 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 2 as we walk with Elijah and Elisha. At first it is unclear whether they are out for a wander or if they are seeking to get someplace. In reality it is Elijah's last day on earth and Elisha decides that he wants to stick around. In verse one we read, *"When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind..."*

Their journey this day begins in Gilgal and heads to Bethel.

From there they go to Jericho and then end up at the Jordan River. In all, they walk 23 miles this day. At each stop, Elijah asks Elisha to stay there, saying, *"Elisha, stay here; for the LORD has sent me..."* And each time Elisha responds, *"As surely as the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you."* He is committed to seeing the journey through. It is an important journey for both Elijah and for Elisha.



Gilgal was a place of remembering. In this place were some standing stones that reminded the Israelites of what God had done for them in leading them into the Promised Land.

From there they headed to Bethel, where Jacob had wrestled with God. Bethel means “house of God” and this place was one of struggle and testing, but also one where God’s blessing was given. From there they traveled on to Jericho. We think of Jericho as a place where the walls came down, where there was victory. But let us recall the path walked to victory. Victory came first through surrender to God and then by pledging allegiance to God and not to any earthly or human power. The victory at Jericho was God’s victory. Even though each stop has meaning and is an opportunity to pause, Elisha keeps moving along with Elijah. And even though the prophets of Bethel and then Jericho tell Elisha that today is the day that Elijah will be taken up into heaven, still Elisha walks on with Elijah, pressing on to the Jordan.

After remembering God’s presence and promise and victory, after remembering the call to seek and trust and surrender, where else to go but to the Jordan? The Jordan is the entrance point into the Promised Land. It is the symbol of death and resurrection through baptism. Where else would Elijah go to be taken up into heaven? Where else would Elisha’s journey of leadership begin?

What is it that led Elisha to continue walking with Elijah, even though he knew what lie ahead? In our passage from Luke, what is it that leads Jesus to call for those who want to follow him to keep walking forward, even though Jesus himself knew that the road would be difficult? Both requests come from the same place. Both are based upon the call to trust in God and to be willing to step forward in faith. Both are calls that demand courage and faith in the one who calls.





Both are calls that invite the faithful to be brought home in the spirit.

These same calls are part of our journey of faith – the call to trust in God, the call to step forward courageously in faith, the call to allow ourselves to faithfully be brought home in the spirit. It is through baptism that we first come to know God’s presence. As we grow and mature, as we continue to journey with God, we learn and claim God’s promises; we grow to claim Christ’s victory over sin and death. On our journey we are ever seeking to be in relationship with God, to grow in our trust in God, and to continually surrender our lives and our will to God’s will and ways. As we journey, by God’s grace, we discover our destination and our purpose. Doing so we set our course towards home, both here on earth and one day in eternity.

As we journey and grow in faith, led and guided by the Spirit, we discover that home is where God is. Yes, home is partly about the relationships that we build with one another, but those human relationships are first and foremost centered and grounded in the relationship we have with God. Our true and lasting home is found first in the one who calls us to faith and then sends us out into the world to be his hands and feet. May we be brought home in the Spirit this week as we seek to bring others home to Christ. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

**GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. What makes Grace UMC “home” for you? How has Grace nurtured you as a person and your faith? How do you share this home with others?
- 2) *Pray*. What ‘buts’ have you offered to God lately? Pray for the Spirit to lead you to follow where God is trying to lead you.
- 3) *Study*. Read 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 4:8-37. In verse 30 the woman echoes Elisha’s words from chapter 2, saying, “*And the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave without you.*” Where is your faith calling you to such a commitment?