



June 29, 2025

Third Sunday after Pentecost

~ Luke 9:51-62 ~

Bishop Carla Blakley

Eastern Synod

At a recent dinner party—and we host them often—someone leaned over their plate and asked, "So, Carla, what's the sermon this week?" It's a common question. My neighbours are proud of their unofficial role as sermon consultants. I've come home more than once with scribbled notes on napkins, scraps of paper, or the back of a wine label—holy brainstorming over dessert.

This time, I told them I was working on a passage for later in June: Luke 9. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. He sends messengers ahead to a Samaritan village, but the villagers refuse to welcome him. His disciples are furious. "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to destroy them?"

And around that table, something happened. Every single person started telling stories of rejection.

Stories of not being welcomed.

Stories of being shut out of a relationship.

Of losing a job.

Of being excluded at school or at work.

Of being judged for the colour of their skin, or who they love, or simply for showing up where someone thought they didn't belong.

And I bet you have a story too. We all do.

These are hard stories. They don't leave us. They leave us raw. And if we're honest, we sometimes want the same thing the disciples wanted: fire. God's wrath. Cosmic payback.

I remember when I was in grade 12. I made an appointment with my Lutheran pastor—not ELCIC—and proudly told him I wanted to be a pastor.

He laughed. Not a chuckle—a belly laugh.

His wife, who was also the church secretary, stopped the Gestetner machine and stared. "We don't ordain girls," he said. "What were you thinking, Carla?"

That hurt. Deeply. In that moment, if I could've called down fire, I might have.

Back at the dinner party, I wasn't the only one. My friends wanted a superhero to swoop in and set things right—to punish the people who told them, "You don't belong." "You are not welcome here."

But Jesus' response in Luke is striking: He rebukes his disciples. Not just because they're being violent, but because they're still thinking like the world thinks. Their framework is vengeance and power.

His is peace and grace.

And it's hard to make that shift.

I've been reading a book by Adam Grant called *Think Again*. It's one of those rare books that makes you pause. I'd read a paragraph, put it down, and sit in silence. That's the point of the book: to rethink. To examine not just what we believe, but *how* we think.

He writes, "If knowledge is power, knowing what we don't know is wisdom."

That line lingers.

He challenges us to question our assumptions, to embrace being wrong, and to cultivate intellectual humility.

Not to defend our beliefs out of fear. Not to attack others to prove we're right. But to become learners again. Curious. Humble. Willing to be wrong.

And it struck me: this isn't foreign to the gospel. It's embedded in it.

Luke says, "Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem."

He knew where he was going. He knew it would cost him.

Along the way, people come forward, wanting to follow him—but they hesitate.

"Let me bury my father."

"Let me say goodbye to my family."

Reasonable requests. And Jesus replies with urgency:

"No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Now, Jesus isn't saying family is bad, or that grieving is wrong.

He's saying: there's something bigger happening. Something that requires us to hold our beliefs loosely, our identity lightly, and our future openly.

Because faith—real faith—is not about clinging to what we've always known.

It's about being ready to rethink, again and again, in the light of love, justice, and truth.

Jesus rebukes the disciples because they want to fit him into their old assumptions.

But discipleship is not about having it all figured out.

It's about confusion, discomfort, and unlearning.

And this, friends, is holy.

Doubt is not the enemy of faith.

Rigidity is.

Jesus doesn't offer us certainty. He offers us a path. A path that asks us to grow. To shift. To be wrong. And still be loved.

What Jesus is challenging is not just our personal comfort. He's challenging the social norms that decide who is in and who is out. Who is worthy of love. Who gets to belong.

We live in a time when many are rethinking the church. And that's not a crisis. That's an opportunity.

How to go outside the church doors and be community, to open the church to all and neighbours.

LGBTQIA+ siblings asking: Can I be fully seen here?

Survivors of spiritual trauma asking: Can I ever trust religion again?

Young adults asking: Does this institution reflect Jesus or something else entirely?

To follow Jesus today is to stand with those questions—not against them.

Rethinking is not betrayal. Rethinking is *devotion*.

Rethinking who God is in light of science, history, and experience? **Holy**.

Rethinking what Scripture says about women, queer people, race, and power? **Holy**.

Rethinking our past complicity in systems of exclusion? Painful—but **holy**.

So maybe this week, instead of praying for fire, we pray for clarity.

Not the clarity of certainty—but the clarity that comes from love.

And maybe we hear Jesus again, saying not, "Be right," but "Follow me."

You may be rethinking everything right now.

Good.

Jesus walks with people on the road—not the ones who have it all figured out, but the ones who are willing to walk, and wonder.

Amen.