

Fire from Heaven

Ken Wilson, 4/25/21

I come from a cultural background that is always about modulating emotion, dialing it down. Which can be helpful in certain situations, but it can also drive our feelings underground where they play by themselves without our attention and come out in indirectly unhelpful ways.

So one of the things I love about Scripture is the way that the emotions are so evident, so freely expressed and so little judged. I find reading these stories helps me access my own emotions in order to make space for them and let them pass.

Anger of course is one of the most challenging emotions we have. It can wear us out. There are no easy answers. There are so many things to be angry about, legitimately. Plus, our anger about thing can attach itself to another thing and the people around us are like, "I'm not sure where your anger is coming from." Half the time, if we're honest, we're like, "I'm not sure either!"

Jesus and the tradition he is part of, the Jewish tradition, offers a vision of God is at the same above and beyond our human emotions but also familiar with our emotions at ease with our emotions and affirming of our emotions—there's some sense in which emotions are part of our being in the image and likeness of a God is also moved, can be sad, angry, delighted, compassionate.

Emily picked out a portion from Luke 9 last week, the feeding of the 5,000 and especially through the meditation helped me connected with gratitude. So I went back and read Luke 9 and noticed how anger, especially anger at rejection-hostility from other human beings played out in that portion.

Luke begins with Jesus calling the twelve together to send them into the small towns of the Galilee with his message of good news and combining that with prayer for healing. And he gives them instructions for when they are treated poorly: "And if any people don't take you in hospitably, when you go out of that town shake the dust off your feet as testimony against them." Of course, in the Middle East at that time, hospitality was huge—there was very high value on receiving strangers with hospitality: giving them

water, feeding them, sheltering them, as they traveled through your town. To be refused hospitality was not only deeply insulting, it was also an act of hostility. People relied on hospitality for their well-being. There's something about the image of shaking the dust off your feet when we experience hostility or reject's a compelling image isn't? It's not so easy to shake dust off your feet! The dust clings to our feet. Anger at rejection, at the hostility of others can be like that.

So they go out two by two and take the good news from place to place and by the this time Jesus is drawing huge crowds ... and this leads to the feeding of the 5,000. Then, at the height of his popularity, when all this new-found celebrity is probably going to their heads, Jesus starts warning that he plans to go to Jerusalem and expects that he will be rejected there, but he's going anyway, possibly to his death. Something they do not want to face. So he says, "Look, if you're not willing to face your death, you're not able live your life." Then he takes three of them up on a small mountain where they were undergo a mystical experience in which Moses, the Lawgiver, and Elijah the prophet of all appear. It's so intense, they fall asleep like babies sometimes do at a concert. They come down from the mountain ahead of Jesus and encounter an afflicted person who seeks their healing prayer—but they are complete failures in helping the person. So we're talking highs and lows in quick succession.

Then the part I want to focus on happens. Let's read it: Now it happened that as the days before he was to be taken up (crucified) were attaining their full number, he fixed his intent on traveling to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, and their journey brought them to village of the Samaria to make ready for him. But those people didn't take him in, because he intended to travel to Jerusalem.

WE pause for some background: longstanding North – South Divide in Israel, for a long time, two separate kingdoms—sharing stories and laws that became sacred to them but divided for many reasons; we now know that some of these stories and laws were from the people of the northern kingdom critical of the people in the South (Judah) and vice versa. They were all stitched together--these similar but different version by Ezra, a priest who compiled these different sources after the return from the Babylonian exile when the current temple, the second temple in Jerusalem was being built after being

destroyed. Now Samaria had a temple that was in direct competition with the temple in Jerusalem, so there was great religious animosity, apparently, toward people going to Jerusalem to worship in that temple. So great that usual and expected hospitality was denied them—a great insult, an act of hostility.

Text in Mark

Background:

Northern Tribes/Judah

Samaritans

Fire from Heaven: Sodom (Midrash)

Fire from Heaven: Elijah (Midrash)

Jesus never did any Elijah type signs (closet, disrupting temple commerce, cursing fig tree)

Before getting too high and mighty: misplaced anger on the part of traumatized people is VERY different than displaced anger on the part of the privileged and comfortable

Risen Jesus—traumatized (wounds) never showed any signs of vengeance; disciples angry at Judas (competing stories of his death) but Jesus had no unkind thing to say about Judas

Reynolds Price Midrash (stories about the story) risen Jesus

We are responsible for our readings of Scripture, our interpretations