

2 Kings 2: 1 - 2, 6 - 14

Psalm 77

Galatians 5: 1, 13 - 25

Luke 9: 51 - 62

### **Notes on the Old Testament Lesson**

*2 Kings 2: 1 - 2, 6 - 14*

The symbolism of this event is often overlooked. These crossings of the Jordan recall its crossing by Joshua when the Hebrew people entered the Promise Land just as that event recalled the crossing of the Red Sea by Moses. Elisha is called to be as strong a spiritual leader as Joshua was a military leader. No miracle was needed to cross the Jordan. It has never been a large river (see photo at right and recall Naaman's contempt in 2 Kings 5 when he saw the Jordan).



Throughout the Bible, whenever a proclamation is declared, God's great deeds from the past are often recalled. Stephen's speech in Acts 7 and Paul's in Acts 13 are examples of this. In this week's text, one of God's great acts of deliverance is evoked; reminding Elisha and the reader of God's constant love and care.

### **Notes on the Gospel Lesson**

*Luke 9: 51 - 62*

The first verse of this passage is often misunderstood to mean that Jesus immediately departed Galilee and went straight to Jerusalem. Instead, this marks the beginning of a transitional period from his ministry in Galilee to the events in Judea. Both Mark 10:1 and John 10: 40 - 42 show that Jesus spent an extended time on the eastern side of the Jordan River. John's passage is especially instructive, saying that Jesus went "where John had been baptizing earlier". John 3:23 reveals this area to be Aenon which was near the Jordan River. It was also very close to the northern border of Samaria which explains the encounter with the Samaritan village.

The final paragraph of this Sunday's text is full of allusions and allegory. In the Middle East, a fox is an enemy. During the first century, the term fox was also used to designate a Gentile enemy (see Luke 13:32). Birds were - and are to this day - considered to be pests. People of the Middle East think of birds as we in America do of rats and roaches. Jesus' statement that he had no place to lay his head is also not to be understood literally. He had a home (see Mark 2:1 and others). This declaration is classic Middle Eastern overstatement. Jesus is saying that those who seek power will not find it as his disciples. This statement is in the same vein as his actions in John 13:2 - 17 when he humbly washed the disciples' feet.

Jesus' next exchange is also often misunderstood. The man's father was still alive; else he would not be on the roadside but arranging the funeral. In that day, as in modern Jewish and Middle Eastern practice, the dead are buried the day of their death. What the man is saying to Jesus is that once he fulfills his obligation to his family, once his father dies, then he will come to be one of Jesus' disciples. Even today, one of the most affectionate phrases that an older Middle Eastern person can say to a younger friend is, "You will bury me." It means, "I know that you will always be my faithful friend as long as I am alive. You will never desert me." Jesus is telling the man to renounce his obligations to his family. Jesus demands that our allegiance to him must be greater than our allegiance to our parents or to our children.

In contrast to the previous comments, the final statement is very straightforward. First century plows had a single blade. In order to keep the furrows straight, the farmer had to keep his focus on the proper alignment of the blade. The slightest wavering of attention could cause the plow blade to go significantly out of line, wasting precious ground in the area being plowed. This lesson calls us not only to "Turn our eyes upon Jesus" but to keep them focused on him and on him alone.