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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA

June 29, 2025

Year C, Proper 8, Revised Common Lectionary

[1 Kings 19:15-16,19-21](#)

[Psalm 16](#)

[Galatians 5:1,13-25](#)

[Luke 9:51-62](#)

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I wonder how many different places you've laid your head in your life. Some of us here today may have lived in the same place our whole life. Others may move from place to place each night, looking for a safe place to sleep. And for others it may be somewhere in between—moving every few years, packing and unpacking, settling in and starting over.

Growing up, my family moved roughly every three years. So I've had plenty of practice with the winnowing process: what to bring along, what to leave behind. And yet somehow, practice doesn't make it easier. Recently my mother gave me a box of my old items that had been in her basement. In it were some priceless treasures, beloved soft animals from my childhood, but also random tenth-grade French homework and some old baseball cards, definitely not the collector's item kind but the ones from players no one remembers. It still took me three hours to go through the box.

Some of us may find it harder to throw things away than others, but I think we all have an impulse to hold on to things that give us a sense of grounding and security. So today's Gospel is challenging: "*Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.*" Those among us who have experienced homelessness may understand this verse more viscerally than anyone else. For Jesus, this was often literally true. He and his followers went from town to town, depending on the hospitality of strangers. In today's reading he's rejected by a village of Samaritans who won't take him in when they see that he's headed to Jerusalem because of the historic mistrust between Samaritans and Judeans. Being turned away from a village might mean a several hours' journey on foot to the next village, or perhaps sleeping in a field that night. But of course what awaits him in Jerusalem is worse: trial, humiliation, and death on a cross.

The pattern of rejection—of being unmoored—is central to the Christian story. It's echoed in the lives of saints and prophets across time. I think of the Roman Catholic archbishop Oscar Romero, now a saint in that church, who was archbishop of San Salvador in the late 1970s. Perhaps you've seen the 1989 film *Romero* about his life. At the start of the film, Romero has a nice, cushy place to lay his head. He's surrounded by well-dressed government officials who flatter him and ask for private baptisms for their babies. He has a secure place to lay his head. But when Romero begins to realize what the gospel demands of him, he has to abandon that security. He's a conservative man with a deep life of prayer. And that prayer life leads him to speak out against the government's repression of poor people. He negotiates with rebels and celebrates Mass in occupied cities. On the 24th of March, 1980, Bishop Romero was assassinated. For Bishop Romero, learning to follow Jesus meant giving up his prestige, his comfort, and in the end, his life.

Sometimes the things that keep us from walking in Jesus's footsteps are more subtle. In today's reading from Galatians, Paul writes that the Christian life is not about following a precise set of rules. "*Be guided by the Spirit,*" he writes: and, quoting, Jesus, "*The whole law is summed up in a single commandment: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" That sounds freeing, but it can also be disorienting. We might prefer having clear checklists of what's right and wrong—or *who's* right and *who's* wrong. But in Christ those are swept away in favor of the rule of love. But the rule of love is messier. It requires continual listening, continual humility. It forces us to admit that we might not have everything figured out.

Often we get uncomfortable with that way of living. Instead of living in the tension of listening to the Spirit's guidance, of being open to change and new ideas, we retreat into the neat mental systems we construct to explain reality. You might say that having things figured out is a kind of soft pillow. A place to lay our heads.

It's ironic that even as Paul writes about living in freedom and not submitting to the slavery of the law, people through the centuries have used this exact passage as a checklist for who's going to heaven and who isn't. "Fornication—check. Drunkenness—check. *Carousing!* Definitely check." I'm not quite sure what counts as carousing—I think some Episcopalians I know might be in trouble there. But Paul's point isn't to make a checklist about what behavior gets you saved and what behavior doesn't. That's the opposite of Paul's point which in the end is all about grace. God's grace doesn't come from our good behavior. Grace is a free gift of love that leads us to love God and neighbor in return. That's why Paul speaks of these behaviors as "fruits." Holy, transformed lives aren't a condition for God's grace, they're the result of it.

James and John were thinking in terms of conditions and checklists, of who's in and who's out. When they got rejected by the Samaritans, they knew who was out. They wanted to torch the village with fire from above. Jesus sets James and John straight—and he does the same to us. We may not be as brash as James and John, but we may well have those moments when we'd like to torch our enemies, if not literally then at least metaphorically; when we wish they'd simply be eradicated. How different are Paul's words: "Through love become servants to one another."

In our life together as the Church, the Holy Spirit continues to shake us up—if we’re willing to listen. Through the Spirit’s promptings, the Church has realized that the Gospel of Christ often breaks us out of the assumptions we had thought were built into the way the world works. Two hundred years ago, many Christians defended slavery. Just two generations ago, large portions of this country could scarcely imagine a society where people of different races used the same drinking fountain. Fifty years ago Episcopalians fought bitterly over the ordination of women, and twenty years ago over same-sex marriage and the ordination of LGBTQ people. When the Spirit opens our eyes, transformation happens. But change can also feel threatening. It pulls us out of our comfort zones. It’s part of what it means to have “no place to lay our heads.”

And not all change is from God. So it’s not simple to tell whether a change in the status quo is a bad idea or a tug from the Spirit. It takes discernment, and community, and often conflict, as it did for Paul and the Galatian community as they wrestled with the call to include Gentiles in the church for the first time. In this very epistle to the Galatians Paul writes with real anger at times. He sharply criticizes Peter when he thinks Peter is waffling on that full inclusion. There will be times when we have to engage in conflict: to fight hard and fight fair, to be willing to struggle for what we believe is right; even while we remember that in the realm of God we have no permanent enemies, but only opponents; that those who we disagree with and even those who wish us harm are still in the end children of God. In short, to hear that great commandment to love one another.

The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. In our journey with Christ, we can be held back by the things we think we need—whether they’re material things, social status, or long-held beliefs. As we learn to walk the way of the Messiah, may we be guided by the Spirit out of all the things that we think make us secure, and into the only real security there is—the challenging joy of walking with God.