

Third Sunday After Pentecost -- June 30, 2019
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charlie Heup

“Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.”
(1 Timothy 1:2, EHV)

Luke 9:57-62 (NIV)

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." (58) Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (59) He said to another man, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." (60) Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." (61) Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family." (62) Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Fellow Followers of Jesus,

It's not always easy to be a follower. Did you ever play a game of follow the leader when you were young? Perhaps the game started out rather simply. But you might recall that sometimes the leader asked you to follow some rather difficult and challenging instructions. Perhaps you've tried to follow someone as you were driving somewhere. That can be quite a challenge especially if the individual you are following takes you on an unfamiliar route or decides to make a bit of a detour for an unexpected stop. Perhaps you even regretted suggesting or agreeing to follow along.

The focus of our worship service today reminds us that we might include similar challenges and difficulties as we follow Jesus. **Christ has set us free to deny ourselves – picking up our crosses – and to follow him.**

Following Jesus is living our lives with the confidence that He is our Lord and Savior who has set us free from our guilt, from our sins, and from eternal death so that we might enjoy the blessings of living for all eternity with him. The conversations Jesus had, in our text, with some "would-be" followers help us to understand the cost of following Jesus and serve to prepare us for what lies ahead of us on our journey to eternity with Jesus..

Theme: Let Us Follow Jesus

1. Even when the way is rough (57-58)
2. Even when the time is inconvenient (59-60)
3. Always looking straight ahead (61-62)

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." (58) Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." As Jesus and his disciples were walking along a road, an unidentified man promised to follow Jesus everywhere! Did he know what he was saying? Or was he like so many wanted to be connected to Jesus to enjoy great worldly blessings when he would establish his kingdom. (which they mistakenly assumed would be a worldly one.)

In Matthew's account of the incident this individual is identified this individual as a scribe (teacher.) As we know many of the scribes were hostile to Jesus but this man saw crowds, miracles and excitement and had a desire to get in the action without completely understanding what he was promising to do. Discipleship involves denying self, sacrifice and even suffering.

Jesus' response to this man who promised to follow Jesus "wherever he would go" paints a realistic picture for this would be follower. He also pictures his humility for us. The creator of all has no place to call home. Jesus was laid in a borrowed manger, at his birth. One area of the country after another rejected him and turned him away during his earthly ministry. He was accused of being demon-possessed. Ultimately he is even forsaken by his heavenly Father for our sake. Jesus once reminded his disciples that the student is not above his teacher (cf. Matthew 10:24). Disciples of Jesus may experience the same kinds of rejection from the people in this world that Jesus did. But they will never be rejected by our heavenly Father! Because Jesus was suffered the rejection and punishment we deserved in our place, we can be confident of the Father's protection as we follow Jesus on the rough paths of this life. That's the promise Jesus made to us in Matthew 10:28-31. **Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (29) Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. (30) And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (31) So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.** (NIV)

It seems as if the scribe who wanted to follow Jesus was interested in worldly popularity and gain. Jesus response warns us not to look to Jesus for worldly and earthly gain. On the contrary we will seek only our daily bread with the confidence that the Lord who gladly gave us his own Son will together with him give us all things. (cf. Romans 8:32 & 1 Timothy 6:6-8) The Apostle Paul explained it well when he said, **"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength."** (Philippians 4:12-13 NIV)

Jesus doesn't want to discourage anyone from following him but he does want them to count the cost of discipleship. "It is said that at the time of the Civil War there were many volunteers who eagerly joined the ranks, as if going to war meant nothing more than taking part in parades, drills, and reviews, and receiving medals and honors!" (cf. Hendriksen, pg. 561) There are those who look at being disciples of Jesus in much the same way. There are glorious rewards for those who follow Jesus but the fact remains, we must through much tribulation enter the Kingdom of God.

Let Us Follow Jesus even when the way is rough or when the time is inconvenient.

[Jesus] said to another man, "Follow me." In this instance Jesus invited someone to follow him and to ultimately tell others about him as he proclaimed the kingdom of God. It would seem that this man was already familiar with Jesus and his teachings. He had already been part of the crowds of people who had come to Jesus and heard his teachings. Jesus singled him out and called him to follow him much like had done when he called Peter, Andrew, James and John to leave behind their boats and nets to follow him. Unlike Peter, Andrew, James and John who immediately left everything to follow Jesus, this man wanted to take delay following Jesus for a time. (cf. Matthew 4:18-22, Luke 5:11) **He replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father.**

Jesus regarded this response as an excuse. It appears as if this individual loved his dead father more than Jesus. (cf. Matthew 10:37, Luke 14:26 above) This didn't appear to be a convenient time for him to follow Jesus. On another occasion Jesus explained the need for his disciples to put him first. **"If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters--yes, even their own life--such a person cannot be my disciple.** (Luke 14:26 NIV) Those are some strong words! And certainly Jesus is not contradicting what he said in Matthew 15:4 **"God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death."** The point that Jesus is making very strongly is that he is to be our first love and that if anything would interfere with putting him first it must be hated or avoided.

In this situation it is clear that the man has faced with a choice. He could either follow Jesus and proclaim the kingdom of God or attend to his dead father – who may have even been an unbeliever as Jesus's response to this man's excuse seems to suggest. **"Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and**

proclaim the kingdom of God." There really was nothing more the man could do for his Father. Jesus encourages him to serve the living.

At times it may seem a bit inconvenient to us to follow Jesus. Situations like that provide us with an opportunity to examine our priorities in the light of the blessings that are ours in Christ!

Theme: Let Us Follow Jesus

1. Even when the way is rough
2. Even when the time is inconvenient
3. Always looking straight ahead

Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Once again someone volunteered to follow Jesus. However it seems, he's not quite ready to so just yet. He wants to go back and say farewell to his family. Interestingly, that's exactly what Elisha did in the OT lesson. So we might wonder why Jesus didn't permit him to do this. Could it have been that this man was second guessing his decision? Was he in danger of being convinced not to follow Jesus by his family?

Jesus' reply to the man's desire to say farewell to family is a reminder that it is easy for us to get distracted in our service to the Lord. Following Jesus requires our complete focus so that we will become distracted by the affairs of this world. Jesus isn't suggesting that we should not love our families and be concerned about our parents – but he is warning us not to let worldly affairs interfere with our service to him.

Jesus made use of a familiar proverb that dated back to 800 B.C. You can't plow a straight line if you are looking backward instead of forward any more than you can drive in straight line if you are looking elsewhere. Interestingly the Greek phrases in this proverb provide additional insights for us -- the phrase *putting his hand to the plow* suggests one who is first beginning to plow (a beginner). The phrase *looks back* suggests not an occasional backwards glance but staring to the rear. That's no way to learn to plow and it's no way to begin to follow Jesus.

Jesus wants this individual and us to understand the total commitment involved with following him. Once again the words and example of the Apostle Paul serve as an encouragement to us. **Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.** (Philippians 3:13-14 NIV)

For the Apostle Paul forgetting the past included, among other things, setting aside his ideas that his works made him acceptable in God's sight. We may also have to set aside our former way of thinking and living as we follow Christ. That's the challenge of always looking ahead. The writer to the Hebrews offers us this encouragement; **Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.** (Hebrews 12:1-3 NIV)

Jesus' words about the challenges that await those who follow him have given us lots to think about. The cost is high. It's no wonder that on another occasion Jesus spoke about following him in this: **"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."** (Matthew 16:24 NIV) The hymn writer of the hymn we sang before our sermon today had these words of Jesus in mind as he contemplated not only the cost but the blessings which Christ offers those who follow him.

Ponder those words as you hear them again.

Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken (CW 465)

Jesus, I my cross have taken, All to leave and follow you.
Destitute, despised, forsaken, You on earth once suffered, too.
Perish ev'ry fond ambition, All I've ever hoped or known;
Yet how rich is my condition! God and heav'n are still my own.

Let the world despise and leave me; They have left my Savior, too.
Human hearts and looks deceive me; You are not, like them, untrue.
And since you have smiled upon me, God of wisdom, love, and might,
Foes may hate and friends may shun me - Show your face, and all is bright.

Go, then, earthly fame and treasure! Come, disaster, scorn, and pain!
In your service pain is pleasure; With your favor loss is gain.
I have called you Abba, Father! You my all in all shall be.
Storms may howl, and clouds may gather; All must work for good to me.

Haste, my soul, from grace to glory, Armed by faith and winged by prayer.
All but heav'n is transitory; God's own hand shall guide you there.
Soon shall end this earthly story; Swift shall pass the pilgrim days,
Hope soon change to heav'nly glory, Faith to sight and prayer to praise.

“May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with you all.”
(2 Thessalonians 3:16, EHV)