

“As Disciples of Jesus”
Sermon delivered 6-25-10
Immanuel Lutheran Church
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Luke 9:51–62

When the days drew near for [Jesus] to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

⁵²And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; ⁵³but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. ⁵⁴When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" ⁵⁵But he turned and rebuked them. ⁵⁶Then they went on to another village. ⁵⁷As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." ⁵⁸And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." ⁵⁹To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." ⁶⁰But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." ⁶¹Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." ⁶²Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Hard Sayings

The Gospel this morning comes from a section known as the “hard sayings of Jesus”. Discipleship is difficult for the best of us. Jesus is clear about what it means to be a follower. Clear about what it means to be a disciple. There is no fine print. You know some of the other hard sayings of Jesus like “take up your cross and follow me” and “no greater love than to lay down ones life for another.” I want to be clear from the beginning this text is about discipleship not about salvation. You are saved by the grace of God, through faith. You are a Christian by your baptism. Being a disciple, taking on a discipline as a Christian is like any discipline involving routine, practice, and continuity to the faith. Some of you this morning may be searching with questions like, what does it mean for me to be a Christian? Do I want to be? Some of you may be here because this is what you do on Sunday morning without question. Some of you may be examining or re-examining your faith. Christianity is like workout in the garden, in the gym, or on the bike. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran German theologian said “discipleship requires us to make a fundamental decision to follow Jesus and to accept the consequences of that decision.” This morning I want to explore being a disciple of this Jesus through our Gospel.

Samaria

Jesus leaves Galilee. On his way to Jerusalem, the normal journey would travel around Samaria, but he decided to go through Samaria. This information becomes relevant to our text in understanding why James and John want to call fire down from heaven. The Samaritans did not extend any hospitality to Jesus and his disciples. The Samaritans were half-breeds in the eyes of the Jews, because when many of the Jews were sent into exile 500 years before, many in Samaria married Canaanites and took on their gods. So, the Jews would not eat

with them, socialize with them, or even touch them. The feeling was mutual. This is why the story of the Good Samaritan was an insult in terms of the question of neighbor. James and John reacted to this rejection by wanting to bring down fire.

Who doesn't relate to James and John? Most of us like being accepted, not rejected. Many of us do things so we are not rejected, but liked. This is a powerful motivator in our lives. But if we look at it through the lens of discipleship, we see it is no big deal to Jesus. We reject others, they reject us, they want to teach us something, we want to get even. Revenge, eye for eye, tooth for tooth is a "natural" response. Getting even can be more important than being a disciple. "If you hate the evil without loving the good, you just become a darn good hater."(William Sloan Coffin).

Spirit of Love

Jesus' response to them, and to us, when this happens in our lives is this, "you do not know what spirit you are of." As a "disciple of Jesus" the spirit/attitude/and the energy you have toward another is critical. James and John, the Sons of Thunder, were enraged in wanting to command fire from heaven. They were lacking the spirit. They were following the right person, but with the wrong spirit. You can know your Bible inside out; hit a perfect note in every hymn you sing, and keep all the commandments, but without the spirit of God. If you lack the spirit of love in your actions, it is not of God. Jesus brings these words close to home when he says, "anyone who says they love God, but hates their brother/(sister) is a liar." Ouch!!!

Discipleship begins with the soul. This is more than about getting out "act together". This is about trusting the spirit of God's presence in our lives to transform us. This is about recognizing the God in whom we live, move, and have our being. This is about the Spirit of God transforming our rejection, hatred, revenge, and bitterness into love, compassion, and freedom. Everyone who hates is stuck, trapped, and a prisoner. Discipleship is about knowing what is going on inside of you, the war, the struggle, the shame, and routinely asking and praying for a new way of being in love.

No Lip Service

Jesus is on the way. A person comes up to him and says, "I will follow you wherever you go." Who doesn't get caught up in excitement of the moment, and make promises they struggle to keep because they didn't count the cost. Jesus lays it out plainly. The challenge of being a disciple of Jesus is illustrated by explaining that the Son of Man has no place to lay his head. Again, this is not about you being a good person, this is not about going to heaven or hell, this is not about brownie points. This is about living in the fullness and presence of God everyday of your life. It is like going to the gym every week to build muscles, do cardio, or stretch. Getting a gym membership doesn't make you healthy if you don't go, work out, and practice anymore than just believing Jesus is Lord makes you a disciple. God wants you, not just your membership, but your life. He doesn't want the lip service. God wants you, all of you.

Now what does this mean? Again, this is not about getting God to love you more because you are more committed, but a response to this love of God. Jesus invites someone to follow him. I am guessing another Samaritan said he would BUT, BUT he has to go and “bury his father.” Now please know these words of Jesus are in Semitic exaggerations to make a point, like if your eye causes you to sin pluck it out. The request of this man was probably to go and bury his father’s bones for a second burial. The first burial would have been in a tomb for decomposition for 12 months. Jesus is saying let those already dead in the family tomb rebury their own. The Kingdom for Jesus and in Jesus is at hand. The Kingdom of God is radical as it comes into a person’s life.

Leave Your Baggage

If you are a member of the YMCA/Gold’s Gym/ Idaho Athletic Club, you can usually think of ten thousand reasons for not going from time to time. It is too cold, too hot, or something. You might say, “I need to go to the gym”, or “I need to follow this Jesus”, BUT.... I have to_____, then I can. Sound familiar? Commitments are tough. Being a disciple of Jesus is tough. It requires we make decisions and not sit on a fence. A decision to love, forgive, turn the other cheek. You cannot take hate, arrogance, grandiosity, and revenge on the journey.

In the last encounter, a person wants to go and say goodbye before following Jesus. This is reasonable. Most of us would want to say goodbye before leaving. Jesus was not anti-family like the Moonies. The focus is not on the family. The emphasis is on the past when Jesus talks about looking ahead when plowing a field. When you follow this Jesus you are called into a future, a new way of being, acting, and loving. You are set free from being a slave to your past. God doesn’t care where you came from, what you’ve done, or haven’t done. You are invited to come into this new adventure. Someone once said that looking back while moving forward is as ridiculous as driving a car while looking through the rear view mirror. What is holding you back from being a disciple of Jesus? You call may not be able to leave your family, job, or community, but you can live in the fullness of God where you are at the moment. Some of you may have call to leave with the gifts God has given you. Some of you may say “No”. I will revisit this decision later.

Demands and Expectations

Not only do we decide individually to follow and be a disciple of this Jesus, but we do so as the Body of Christ. Most Churches with a 100 year history are subject to looking at the ways they have always done things. Newer Churches are excited about what they are going to be doing. Open to the new and exciting things God is going to do through them. An older Church can be like the elder brother and elder sister of the prodigal. Every time a question comes up, we ask, “what have we always done?” New churches ask, “what are we going to do?” The question before us individually, and as the Body of Christ, is not a question between good and evil (According to George Caird in his commentary on Luke), but the difficult choice is between what is good and what is best. You want to do

your best, and God wants the best from you as his disciple. This is not easy. Just because we know it is good for us, like going to the gym, doesn't make it any easier. When you walk out of this sanctuary, you face some difficult questions. Demands and expectations will pull you in different directions.

Calling You

Did these three Samaritans follow Jesus? We don't know. If Jesus answered us the way he answered them, about no place to lay your head, let the dead bury the dead, and when you put your hand to the plow and look back you are not ready. You are not alone in this journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, or from here to your home to your workplace. You are not alone. God is with you. The call to discipleship is a lifelong invitation and journey in the presence of God. Some of you may take a break; some of you may want to journey today. Some of you may be too tired, frustrated, or angry. Wherever you are this morning, hear again, this is not about your salvation, this is not just about doing more, and this is not about getting saved. This is about the presence of God in your life, calling you to new life.