

Luke 9:51-62

June 26, 2016

Grace and peace to you from God our Creator, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!
Amen.

Once again, Jesus is on the move as Luke tells us “he set his face to go to Jerusalem.” He just never seems to stay put for very long does He? Prior to His departure, as was customary, messengers are sent to the village ahead announcing the nearing arrival of a group of travelers so the appropriate hospitality may be rendered. This village was a Samaritan village and they did not receive Jesus. Samaritans and people of Judea were not exactly the best of friends. James and John apparently are a bit miffed at their lack of hospitality and ask Jesus if they should call down fire from heaven to destroy them. Jesus will have none of that and rebukes the two and keeping his face set on Jerusalem heads to another village. Getting revenge is not in the cards. Move forward He says and set your eyes on God’s mission.

Jesus has only one thing on his mind and that is following the will of His Father that leads Him to Jerusalem knowing fore well what lays in wait for Him there. On the way Jesus encounters 3 individuals. One proclaims, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Another says to Him, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family.” To another Jesus extends this invitation, “Follow me.” But to that invitation the individual responds, “Lord, first let me go bury my father.”

Jesus is essentially saying to these 3 individuals, His disciples and those others following him, and to all who will come after them that following Jesus will not always be a bed of roses. It does and will require sacrifice, dedication, and focus. They (we) will, at times, be asked to

leave behind the security and safety at home and all other things we cling on to so tightly in an effort to maintain control and provide a sense of comfort in our lives. Following Jesus surely will lead to familial relationships and bonds to at times be tested. More often than not we get the notion in our heads that following Jesus will bring nothing but positives to our life.

Ultimately, we know this will be true at the last when Jesus comes again. However, life as a disciples of Jesus in the here and now will at times be strenuous and challenging. It will force us to make difficult decisions with our time and money. It will call us to ask, "What and who is important in my life?" This isn't easy stuff because Jesus never said it would be easy and certainly the path Jesus walked led Him to a variety of places He surely didn't always want to go. Most notably the cross; yet, Jesus did continue to walk the path out of His great love for His Father and His great love for all people and redeeming them from the stranglehold of all that gets in the way of a full and life-giving relationship with God. Jesus promises new life. He promises transformation. He promises wholeness; however, He also knows that in order to truly live into that reality we must let go of those things that draw us away from Him. When He says, "Follow me," what are those "but firsts" and excuses that we respond with? What are those things that cause us to take our hand off the plow, look back, and lose focus of the course Jesus has set us upon?

We could easily substitute a whole lot of "but firsts" into this passage and arrive at the same conclusion. "But first let's see if someone else will do it." "But first let's see if there is enough money." "But it's never been done that way." "But that's the (blank) committees' job and not mine." "But I don't know what to say." "But I have too many other things going on in my life." "But I am scared." "But, no one has ever asked me." "But, it's my money." We have

all been there and fallen prey to this trap of the enemy. We have all succumbed to the comforts of life and the coziness of the little worlds we have so painstakingly and carefully created for ourselves.

In a world that demands so much of our time and energy for so many things we don't like to think discipleship calls us to give more. Yet, it does! Jesus calls for sacrifice. He calls us to respond faithfully with the gifts God has entrusted to us: our time, talents, and treasures. He calls us, at times, to act now. He calls us to move beyond the safety of the status quo and the good times of the past and set our eyes on what lay ahead. This is tough stuff make no doubt about it and Jesus knows we are going to fail at times. He knows the power of all those other things, which occupy our lives and we look to for safety, security, and happiness. He knows the fears of what He calls us to. There are times to patiently wait, discern, and listen. Yet, there are times that He calls us to action, "Right now, right here." Jesus invites us to follow him, to let go of those things that bind us, and to set our face on Him because He knows the life God created us to live. He knows the transformation and change the Spirit will work in our lives when we give ourselves fully to Him. He knows relationships will be strengthened when He is at the center.

This is a difficult passage but this also is a passage of good news because Jesus knew what lay ahead as He set His face toward Jerusalem. He was well aware of how the story would play out. He knew the scorn, pain, and brutal death He would endure. He knew the sacrifice God had called Him to make. He encountered Satan's tests and temptations. Yet, Jesus didn't say, "but first." He didn't turn around. He didn't lose sight. No, Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem and He marched forward. He did all of this so that we might be transformed from a

life of living in fear of God's wrath and condemnation, a life bound to sin and death, to a life lived in light of the resurrection opened to the new life we have in Christ through God's promise of forgiveness and eternal salvation. The good news is that our Savior continues to call out to us with words of "Follow me." And we are not called to sacrifice, dedicate, and focus alone. We are guided by the Holy Spirit, which Jesus gave to His church.