

A Sermon Preached by Pastor Justin Johnson
Our Saviour's Lutheran Church Bellingham, WA 98225
6th Sunday after Pentecost June 27, 2010
Text: Luke 9:51-62

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and from Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Here we are in Luke's gospel at a critical turning point in Jesus' Ministry. He has been out in the countryside going from village to village, teaching, healing, casting out demons and the like. He has become quite popular except, I imagine, in the country of the Gerasenes where as a result of his healing a man, some swineherds lost their livelihood. It would be easy for Jesus to remain in this place. He has followers, he has clout, he has a reputation. But that is not the Father's will for Jesus--no Jesus is to go to Jerusalem.

It would be much safer for Jesus and the Pharisees and scribes if Jesus stayed away from Jerusalem, the center of the political and religious power. But Jesus sets his face to go to Jerusalem. And it is there that he will challenge the authorities by proclaiming God's kingdom coming. It is along the way and in Jerusalem that he will ruffle religious feathers by who Jesus says is welcome and who it is that does not see. And it is in Jerusalem that Jesus will be put to death for the good news that he proclaims. Yes, it is there that Jesus finds the cross. And it is there, Jerusalem, that Jesus sets his face to go.

People are wanting to follow Jesus, and you would think that Jesus would be glad for this and invite people along, but we get some strange responses from Jesus in our gospel reading for today.

One person tells Jesus that he will follow him wherever he goes. Jesus' response is somewhat cryptic: "Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." My interpretation of this is that Jesus is telling the guy, you want to follow me? Do you realize that I don't have a home here on earth, I don't have a place that I sleep every night, I don't even know where I will lay my head, or if there will be a place where I will be able to lay my head down. You are going to follow me wherever I go, this you must know.

Then there is another that Jesus turns to along the way to Jerusalem and says to him, "Follow me." The guy responds, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." This seems like a reasonable request. A request that I would definitely make if my father had died. Perhaps this guy had come to find Jesus in order ask him to come and see what he could do about his father, but instead he gets told to follow Jesus and when he makes a reasonable request, Jesus has a very terse answer, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." One starts to wonder if this whole Son of Man not having a place to lay his head is getting to him.

And then there is a third fellow who said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Again, seems like a reasonable request. Not to Jesus, who responds, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." This is an interesting response, for if you have ever tried to plow a field, you know that you must look straight ahead otherwise you get crooked rows and some ground is left uncultivated.

All three potential followers are faced with a decision, their way or God's way, their desires or God's desires, their timing or God's timing.

The first faces the reality that he will have to give up the comfort of knowing that he will have a comfortable place to lay his head down at night. The second has to make a decision of whether to tend to pressing family matters or not. The third has to decide whether he will leave family members behind without saying good-bye. If he chooses to follow as Jesus has laid out, his family may never know what has happened to him.

Luke does not tell us what any of these three decided to do. Did they decide to follow Jesus or did they choose something else first. And the question comes to us. Do we decide to follow Jesus or do we chose something else first? Do we choose our own personal safety and comfort first? Do we choose tending to important family matters first? Do we want to ensure that our ducks are in a row before we go following Jesus where he leads us?

What is your response when you hear Jesus' call to followership, to discipleship? Is it, "Yes, but first Lord..." What is it that comes first for you? And here we come to the first commandment. You shall have no other gods before me. Luther explains that this means that we are to fear, love, and trust God above anything else. Wherever you put your trust, that is your

god. Whatever or whoever you turn to when the bottom falls out, that is your god.

Like the three potential followers in our Gospel reading, there is uncertainty in following Jesus and there is a dying that must take place in order to follow Jesus. We must die to ourselves and the things that we place first. Jesus was heading to Jerusalem, the place where we would be put to death on the cross, but it is there that Jesus was also raised from the dead. And so the promise in Christ for you and for me, the promise that we are given in baptism is that in Christ, we die to self, and we are raised up new creations, we are given new life. And as Christ calls us to follow him, and we die to self, Christ will take our hand and lead us through death into life everlasting.

Jesus does not promise an easy life or a life filled with happiness, but promises to lead us and guide us and to walk with us through all of life's struggles and he reminds us of the promise of God's love for us and in his death and resurrection he gives us hope for what is to come. Thanks be to God. Amen