

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla

**Scripture:** Luke 9:51-62

*<sup>51</sup> When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. <sup>52</sup> And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to prepare for his arrival, <sup>53</sup> but they did not receive him because his face was set toward Jerusalem. <sup>54</sup> When his disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” <sup>55</sup> But he turned and rebuked them. <sup>56</sup> Then they went on to another village.*

*<sup>57</sup> As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” <sup>58</sup> And 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.” <sup>59</sup> To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” <sup>60</sup> And Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” <sup>61</sup> Another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” <sup>62</sup> And Jesus said to him, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”*

The scripture for today’s sermon opens with a story of rejection, one of many which Jesus bears. Jesus began his journey to Jerusalem where he knows he will give his life for humanity’s salvation. He enters a village of Samaritans who want nothing to do with him, so he and his disciples move on. They dishonored the one they would eventually know as the Messiah. His disciples, James and John suggested to Jesus that he should wipe-out this group of inconsiderate, disrespectful group of people. Of course, Jesus would not do that.

The text continues to tell us about yet more rejection. Jesus extends invitations to individuals to follow him. As we begin reflection on the next part of the text concerning discipleship, I want to share this little story.

The following ad once appeared in a London newspaper: “Men wanted for a hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful.” The ad was signed by Sir Ernest Shackleton, Antarctic explorer. Amazingly, the ad drew thousands of respondents, eager to sacrifice everything for the prospect of meaningful adventure.

Verse 57 of today’s text could be received by us as a sort of ad. Jesus’ invitation to become one of his disciples can be received as a prospect for an adventure, or a fearful and dangerous undertaking. One might jump in with enthusiasm for the adventure, or timidly take time to ask questions and evaluate the possibilities of the outcomes on a journey of being a disciple, and others might quickly respond saying, that’s just not for me.

In this story, Jesus sheds light on the requirements for being a disciple for Jesus. This message that he sends is a little more involved than other times he talked about what it meant to be a disciple. The stakes seem to be higher.

If you remember back when Jesus first pulled together the group of men who were to be his first disciples, he merely said to them, “Follow me,” and they did. To others he told them that he “will make them fishers of men,” and we read that they dropped their nets, and followed him. But from what we are told about these initial callings, he really did not say a whole lot about the requirements. It also seems that from the variety of personalities and vocational choices of the people he chose to be his disciples, that just about anyone could be a disciple. Jesus didn’t say a whole lot about what they could expect in life if they chose to follow him. Following Jesus

would be an adventure into the unknown. Today’s text sheds a little more light on the meaning of discipleship.

Perhaps as the first question that we should consider this morning as we explore this text more thoroughly is why do people today choose to follow Jesus? Why do people accept the call to be disciples for Jesus? More importantly, I we may want to ask ourselves, “Why do I choose to be a disciple for Jesus?” Or if that’s something you are still thinking about, you might want to ask yourself, “Why would I choose to be a disciple for Christ?” What is it that pulls us to want to do it? What is it that is so attractive about Christ that we want to do it?

Jesus did some very remarkable things. He was a miracle worker. He could heal the sick and send out demons from a person troubled with them. He could turn water into wine and multiply a few fish and a loaf of bread into more than enough to feed a few thousand people. That’s pretty exciting. What’s not to like about Jesus? Who wouldn’t want to be a part of a miracle worker’s team?

Jesus accepted everyone, even those that society deemed as being the lowest and scummiest of society. Jesus loved everyone, his words and actions revealed his unconditional love, even when people disappointed him. His love for humanity for all time was so deep that he gave himself as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins.

His love is still felt and seen in our lives today, exactly as he promised. Remember Jesus promised before ascending to be with his Heavenly Father, that he would be with us always, not just to love us, but also to help us, to guide us and through the power of the Holy Spirit, he promised he would empower us to do his work. Those of us who know Jesus find it hard to imagine that anyone would reject his love and his help to live faithful to God’s will every day, and through every situation.

But we know, people do choose not to follow Jesus. And there are those who choose to do so for a while but then change their minds; and still others appear to be walking on the line. However, for these, the truth of the matter is that no one can walk the line on the decision to follow him. Jesus make that very clear in this text. You either choose to follow Jesus or you don’t. And that very challenge or choice is the reason some people choose not to follow Jesus; they know that it takes a real commitment. In fact, it takes a lifetime commitment.

With this commitment comes a lot of unknowns. Jesus tells that to the first person in today’s story who comes to him and says that he wants to follow Jesus. Jesus is right up front with him and says, “you know, I don’t ever know where I am going to sleep each night. I don’t have the securities of home. It’s not easy because I don’t know what each day will bring; it may be good or it may be bad.”

The unknowns of following Jesus can be a real hold up for some people. We like security. We like knowing how things are going to turn out. We like knowing all of the pros and cons of what we are getting into, but when we follow Jesus, we don’t know all of that. When we follow Jesus, we give up the securities of this world and we live by faith. We trust that God is there for us. . . caring for us. . . helping us through the challenging times of following Jesus.

The commitment required to follow Jesus as his disciple also means loyalty to him above all other persons or things. Jesus requires this of the second person that he invites to follow him. The man feels the emotional and societal responsibility of needing to care for his family; especially that of caring for the burial of his father. Now we don’t know from reading this text if the man’s father had just recently died or if the father was healthy now but the man felt he needed to be with his family until the day his father did die. That’s really not important for us to know.

What we should be hearing in Jesus’ response to this man, is not that he is disrespectful of the man’s responsibilities, but that Jesus is asking us a deeper question...”if we cannot make a commitment today, then when?” If you do not make this commitment to follow me now when you feel the calling then when will you do it? What could be more important in life that you would choose it over me?

Jesus asks us the very same questions today. He’s asking us if he is the most important person or thing in our lives? He’s asking us if we are choosing to follow him or the ways of the world. And he’s probably wondering why some of us are putting it off. Why would we choose to live in a world that offers only present-day immediate satisfaction instead of the present and eternal Kingdom which God promises to those who receive and follow Jesus? Jesus is not asking us to forget about our family and our responsibilities, he’s asking us to put him first.

We all do that you know. We all put things off. It’s just too easy to do that. Think about it, how many times have you said to yourself, I really should send so-and-so a card; or I really should visit or call so-and-so, but we put it off to do something else and then we never get around to doing what we thought about doing. Sure, we feel guilty for a while but we soon write it off or we beg forgiveness and we move on to the next thing in life.

Along with this idea of putting off the decision to follow Jesus is the whole thing that some don’t always think of their role as a disciple as an everyday, everybody sort of responsibility. Instead, people may tend to think of discipleship as something only a qualified person does when in fact anyone who receives Jesus into their hearts is expected to live a life of discipleship. There are those who think that working for Jesus is a “when the time and conditions are right,” or a church project sort of thing, when in fact it is an everyday responsibility.

When you and I choose to follow Jesus, we also choose to allow him to live through us. We begin a life of sharing his love with others. We begin living a way that helps others to know him. We will all be challenged in different ways of doing that. Not all of us will be preachers or teachers or church board chairs or choir directors or the like. Some of us will be visitors and listeners, casserole takers and card senders.

Whatever it is that we are doing in life and wherever we are, the conditions are always right to be a disciple for Jesus. God has given us all that we need to be able to do it. Jesus has every confidence in each of us that we can do it. How is it then that we can turn to those who need us, and say the time is not right or I’m not good enough to do something to make a difference? A commitment to following Jesus in discipleship means not putting it off. . . it means putting him first in our lives.

Jesus also teaches one other thing in this text, it’s the lesson that the commitment to discipleship also requires that we look to the future instead of holding on to the past. When the third man tells Jesus that he wants to follow Jesus but first he wants to say goodbye to his friends, Jesus uses this little analogy about a plowman needing to look forward when he plows his field. If the plowman kept looking backwards, he would have a really messed up field. If he looks ahead, he has straight rows for his crops.

Jesus is again up front with us here in his challenge to us. He tells us that we cannot live in the past and be his disciple. He reminds us that we need to give up all the things that we have known as security and trust him. The past helps us to know what we are comfortable with in life. From the past we know what we’ve been successful at and where we have failed. That gives us a feeling of security in the choices we make, that might hold us back from trying something new, in our future.

The past also can hold some very painful moments for us and that can stir up all kinds of feelings for us that become a part of who we are. We can be very angry about something we experienced in life and that anger may be really tough to relinquish. It's easier to hold grudges than to give up our anger when we feel we've been wronged. We might get so consumed by our emotions, or boxed in by them, that we find ourselves unable, unwilling, unworthy to move ahead with what God wants us to do.

Some things happen that happened in our past scared us deeply. We learn lessons from these scares that make us fearful about possibly getting caught in similar situations or that make us fearful of trying something new. Some of us have been hurt so deeply that the thought of ever going through something like the hurtful experience again keeps us from taking risks, even if it means possibly experiencing something better.

Jesus tells us that we need to let go of the past. . . let go of all of these things that hold us back from walking with him into the future. Yes, we can learn from the past and from time to time we may need to look at what we learned from the past, but we cannot allow it to hold us back from journeying into the future, unknown as it may be.

Jesus tells us in these few verses that discipleship requires us to give up our security and walk on into the unknown. Discipleship requires that we don't put Jesus off until a later time, but we walk on with him now. And finally, discipleship requires that we let go of the past and we walk on to live in the unknown future with him.

Jesus did these things. We can see that everywhere in the scriptures. Jesus went into the unknown and gave up his security. He headed for Jerusalem where he knew things were not going to be pleasant for him. His focus on God kept him moving toward doing God's will instead of putting it off. He didn't get discouraged and weighed down by people's refusal of him, instead he kept moving ahead towards accomplishing God's goal; not only of getting to Jerusalem where he would die, but also of sharing the word with those along the way. This is a wonderful example of true discipleship.

God gives us the choice of whether we want to follow Jesus' example. Discipleship to Jesus Christ is a lifelong commitment, admittedly with lots of unknowns, yet, at the same time, receiving the promise of being welcome into God's glorious kingdom here and now, and in the life to come. Amen.