

Pentecost 3 6/30/19
Luke 9:51-62 8C

SERMON TEXT IS THE APPOINTED GOSPEL READING FOR THIS SUNDAY

Jesus has set His face to Jerusalem and we know what happens when He gets there – the arrest, the trial, the crown of thorns, the abandonment, the cross and death. No one and nothing is going to stop Jesus from getting to Jerusalem. But that doesn't mean He won't make a few stops along the way and meet a few people who want to talk to Him.

Like that certain someone who looked at Him as He made His way to Jerusalem and said, "I will follow you wherever you go." That's a rather bold statement, don't you think? It's a bold statement because no one decides to follow Jesus. To follow Jesus, you have to be called to do that. You know that, "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel." God the Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel to follow Jesus. And that must be what happened to this certain someone. He or she must have heard the Word of God and that Word created faith in them, faith so that they say, "I will follow you wherever you go." But still, that is a bold statement to make and no one knows that better than you, Dear Child of God.

You have been called to follow Jesus. It happened at the font, in the new birth of your baptism. And not long after you were called to follow Jesus in the waters of your baptism, about 13 or 14 years later, you donned a white gown and stood before God and congregation to vow that you would live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You even said that you

would continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it. In other words, you said to Jesus, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

And here’s what Jesus has to say about that, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” Foxes have homes to go to and birds have nests, but not so with Jesus Christ. Jesus, you recall, was rejected, turned away. You recall the time He went to His own hometown and preached in the synagogue. He read from the Prophet Isaiah and said, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing (Lk 4:21).” And what was the reaction of those who knew Him as Mary and Joseph’s bouncing baby boy? “Jesus, we will follow you wherever you go?” Nope, they drove Him out of town and brought Him to the brow of the hill on which the city was built, so they could throw Him down the cliff – kill Him, be rid of Him. You recall last Sunday – Jesus meets a man possessed by so many demons, his name is “Legion.” Jesus cast the demons into a herd of pigs, and those pigs are drowned. And the people of the country came to Jesus and said, “You need to leave. We don’t want you around here. Just go away, Jesus.”

If you are going to follow Jesus wherever He goes, understand people will reject you; they will turn you away; they will just ask you to leave. There will be no place for you to lay your head. So, if you are going to follow Jesus, count the cost.

As He journeyed onto Jerusalem, He met another man and Jesus said to him what He said to you at the font, “Follow Me.” And the man’s answer is this: “Let me first go and bury my father.” Jewish law said you had an obligation to bury your dead, especially your own family. So, Jesus as not setting aside Jewish law, the only thing is... this man’s father is not

dead. How do we know that? Very simple: Jewish custom said you buried a person on the day that they died. If this man's father was dead, he would be back home burying his father, not standing there talking to Jesus, and yet, that's exactly where we find this man. It all boils down to when my father is dead, then, then, -- and who knows how long that will be -- then I will follow you, Jesus. This man had an excuse not to follow Jesus and his excuse was divided loyalty.

Divided loyalty. Like when you wake up Sunday morning and think: I have something far more important to do than to go to God's House and hear His Word. When we are too busy for that, we are separating ourselves from the life-giving vine and separated from the life-giving vine, we shrivel up and die. That's why Jesus answer is, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead." If you are going to follow Jesus, you cannot have divided loyalty.

As Jesus keeps making His way to Jerusalem, He meets another man and this man says to Jesus, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." That's a simple request. He just wants to say good-bye. Jesus has no objection to that. But, Jesus does say to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." The warning is this: Follow Jesus, look straight ahead. You don't look back. Paul said it with these words, "Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Ph 3:13-14)." So often, we want to look back -- at the things of this world you love, things more important than Jesus. And when we do that, it would be like someone looking back and trying to plow a field. If you are going to follow Jesus, you must look straight ahead.

“Come follow Me,’ the Savior spake, ‘All in My way abiding; Deny yourselves, the world forsake, obey My call and guiding” {LSB 688:1}. Follow Jesus. Follow Him while counting the cost. Follow Him with no divided loyalty. Follow Him without ever looking back at whatever it is we gave up to follow Him. That’s what Jesus called these people He met traveling to do. But, they have objections, excuses, other priorities. They want to follow Jesus, but on their terms, when it is convenient for them.

Did you notice something? When Jesus pointed out their excuses, their priorities to them, not one of them responded to those words of Jesus. Not one of them looked at Him and said, “You’re right, Jesus. I think we out to do it your way.” Nobody said anything in response. Why are they so silent?

Maybe because we are waiting for you, so you could respond. You who have been called to follow Jesus; you who promised to follow Jesus; you who often fails to count the cost of following Jesus. You who always find something more important to do than follow Jesus and proclaim His kingdom; you who would follow Jesus by looking back with love at the things of this world.

There can only be one response, “I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto You all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended You and justly deserved Your temporal and eternal punishment.” And here’s what Jesus has to say about that: “I set my face to go to Jerusalem. My own disciples said they would follow Me, wherever I go, even to death. But, I was abandoned by one and then another. So I went – alone. I went to the trial, the flogging. I went all the way to Calvary where I was nailed to the cross. I went all the way to death as my life blood was poured out all over the altar of that cross. And I went for those who won’t count the cost; for

those who have divided loyalty; to those who want to look back. For those who said they would follow Me, but don't follow Me. I went, and I won for you the forgiveness of all those sins. Three days after I died, I rose from the dead. I rose to bring that forgiveness, that life and salvation, into your life.

And that exactly what I do. It comes to you as you are washed at the font; as you eat My body and drink My blood; as My Word goes into your ears and into your heart. I say to you what I said to my disciples after My resurrection, "Peace be with you." That's the peace of sins forgiven. That's a call to follow Me. Follow me each and every day. With that call, also comes the forgiveness, life, and salvation that I won for you and delivered to you by means of Word and Sacrament. And, with that call also comes the power, the ability, the strength and the very desire to follow Me; to count the cost; to make Me your top priority; the power never to look back. I did all that for you because I want you to follow Me forever.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.