

Pastor Jon's Sermon on Sunday, June 26, 2022.

"Follow Me"

Text: Luke 9:51-62 where Jesus is on a road trip to Jerusalem.

I wrote my sermon before the Supreme Court decision to overturn Roe vs. Wade. That being said, I would like to offer space for us after church today to process this decision as a community. I have printed a statement from our Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton from the ELCA about the ruling for you to read. I have also printed 15 copies of the ELCA's 1991 social statement on abortion and a letter from the ELCA Wisconsin Bishops. I will be available after church in the library for caring conversation and prayer around this decision.

Our Gospel for today can't be ignored. When we have a difficult text, like the one we have today, my preaching professor always told us to lean into it. So here it goes.

Luke tells us that Jesus has set his face toward Jerusalem. What does it mean to set your face toward something? Isaiah uses the language of setting your face like flint in 50:7 when the prophet knows he will face rejection. Setting your face toward something means you are dug in... unwavering in your mission... and that you are expecting strong opposition.

And we know what happens in Jerusalem as we near the end of Luke. Jesus will face the cross and his death.

Jesus did face strong opposition. Of course from the Pharisees and Scribes. But in this text from the Samaritans. Samaritans were the ultimate outsiders in Jesus' day. Jews saw Samaritans as despised half-blooded heretics! They worshipped on the wrong mountain. And yet Jesus wants to minister to them. He wants to travel through their country instead of taking the circuitous route to avoid them. So, Jesus sent two disciples ahead of him to Samaria to secure food and housing for the travel party. But they experienced rejection. The Samaritans didn't want anything to do with Jesus. They didn't want to follow a Jewish rabbi who was on his way to Jerusalem.

Due to the Samaritans inhospitality, James and John are angry and want retribution. They ask Jesus if they could send fire down on them from heaven and consume them like prophets of old. But Jesus rebukes this idea of retaliation or retribution. Revenge and retribution are not a quality of Jesus' mission and ministry... nor should it be ours. Remember Jesus told them earlier that they are supposed to shake the dust off their feet and move on to another village.

But isn't this our human nature. We hold grudges. We don't like it when we are rejected or hurt by others. We want to cut off and avoid them all together. We want to retaliate... at least in our minds. We don't say sorry. But Jesus, throughout his ministry, teaches the gospel of love, forgiveness, and grace.

As they are heading down the road, a would-be follower said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus essentially says, "Are you sure?" "Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

Just like James Brown's band when James would say some incoherent words on stage... his band would keep playing waiting for James to something like, "I feel good!" so they could move on. Here Jesus' words need some interpretation.

Jesus is essentially responding to the would-be follower that, "I am homeless." I have nowhere to lay my head. Following me involves trust. Jesus had to trust in the Father's plan for him in Jerusalem and fully rely on the hospitality of others on the way. Are you willing to let go and let God? Are you willing to submit to God's mission, even if at times it means you will face uncertainty?

I shared this text once in a sermon that I did for a point in time count for people who were homeless in Coos Bay/North Bend OR. I proclaimed to them that Jesus was homeless too. And that Jesus knows what it is like to be homeless. Jesus is with you as you go from meal to meal, from place to place.

Does this change how you view people who are homeless if Jesus was homeless himself? It does for me.

Then Jesus said to another, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” Jesus said, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

Ouch! Let the dead bury the dead. Is Jesus using this riddle to describe those who don’t follow him are dead inside? Loyalty to Jesus takes precedence here over a primary filial obligation. Burying your father seems like a good thing. I just experienced this. It was a good thing. So, what is Jesus talking about? To what am I attached today that keeps me from following Jesus fully and freely?

There is something about timing here for Jesus. Following him is a now thing. There is no wiggle room. It’s not a I will follow you now Jesus when it is convenient for me. Following Jesus means you are willing share in his sacrifice. It is dying to our selfish desires daily. Marriage.

The third would-be follower said to Jesus, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus responds, “You can’t plow a field looking backward. You will go all over the place.”

One commentary said, “The radicality of Jesus’ words lies in his claim to priority over the best, not the worst, of human relationships. Jesus never said to choose him over the devil but to choose him over family. And the remarkable thing is that those who have done so have been freed from the possession and worship of family and have found the distance necessary to love them.”

This is very convicting. I wonder how many of us worship the ideal of family. We struggle in navigating our family relationships at times, don’t we? Oftentimes our greatest hopes and disappointments are wrapped up in our families. Our happiness depends on how our family is doing. Do we worship the family above God like this commentator might be saying? This is a tough one.

What’s the grace in the text? These are such hard sayings of Jesus. Maybe it’s that following Jesus leads to life that really is life. It won’t be the easy road to follow Jesus, but following him through the cross and the resurrection helps us look at our lives differently, especially

when things go sideways. The cross tells us that even in loss we still have reason for hope. Second is that we have a God whose unwavering mission it is to save us, love us, and forgive us. Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem for us and for our freedom from sin and death. As Paul says, we are free from being perfect under the law... free to love the neighbor as ourselves. We are free from trying to ground our happiness in things like family, but in the cross and the resurrection of Jesus.

Amen!