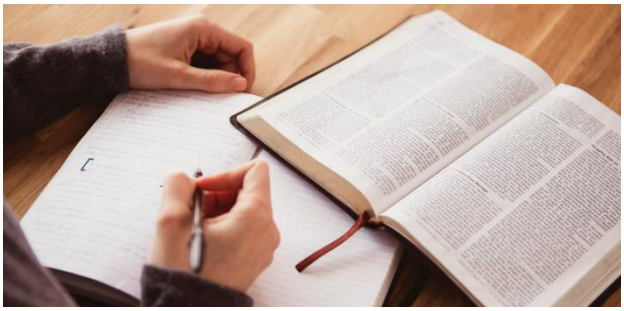
Discipleship in the Lectionary – 06/29/2025



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, June 29th	**Luke 9:51-62**

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Make disciples not consumers

In this week's Gospel lection Jesus formally begins His journey to Jerusalem and appointment with the cross. Along the road He goes out of His way to point out the true cost of following Him to would be followers. This approach by Jesus appears in complete contrast to many consumer-driven churches that build their operation around making emotionally engaged consumers rather than spiritually engaged disciples.

Luke 9:51-62

The opening verse of this week's Gospel lection is also the opening verse of the so-called Travel Narrative detailing Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem (9:51-19:27). It begins in the aftermath of the Transfiguration and ends with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The Travel Narrative is a rich source of Jesus' teachings.

> *51 When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him.*

The language in the first part of v.51, *"for him to be taken up,"* is seen as a reference to Elijah being taken up into Heaven. This Elijah reference is reinforced later in v.54. Regardless of any such reference, Luke must have in mind the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The courage and boldness of Jesus and His sense of mission and purpose is expressed by the phrase, "*he set his face to go to Jerusalem*." This continues the theme of Jesus' commitment to His purpose expressed throughout Luke, beginning as a boy in the temple, with phrases such as "*I must...*" and "*It is necessary...*" (2:49; 4:43; 9:22; 13:33; 19:5; 22:37). Jesus appears to be making the short cut from Galilee to Jerusalem by way of Samaria and sends messengers to a village ahead of Him to prepare.

> *53 But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. 54 And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" 55 But he turned and rebuked them. 56 And they went on to another village.*

The Samaritan feud with the Jews was so strong that they would not help anyone travelling to Jerusalem. According to the Samaritans it was on Mount Gerizim that Abraham was commanded to sacrifice Isaac hence the long running argument on which mountain should God be worshipped, Mount Gerizim or Jerusalem. The Sons of Thunder (Mark 3:17), living up to their names, react to this insult by asking Jesus if He wants them to call down fire from Heaven to consume them. This is another reference to Elijah (2 Kings 1:10). Some manuscripts include

"*as Elijah did*." It also illustrates the faith that James and John have in Jesus - believing they can call down fire from Heaven in His name. Jesus, however, preaches tolerance. The Son of Man came to save, not destroy.

In the following verses several people express the desire to follow Jesus. Some may have been well-intentioned. Many other would-be followers of Jesus thought He would be establishing an earthly kingdom and they wanted to be part of this victory. Jesus explains the cost of following Him.

> *[57] As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." [58] 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."*

In the first case someone boasts they will follow Jesus anywhere. In the Matthew parallel (Matthew 8:19-20) the individual is identified as a scribe and thus a wealthy member of society. Jesus' reply illustrates the man has not considered what this means. Jesus warns that He is functionally homeless. Jesus is essentially saying, "Even the animals have places to live. Are you sure you want to be homeless with Me?"

> *[59] To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." [60] And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."*

In the next case Jesus issues a call to discipleship, but the man asks to first go and bury his father. This may seem like a reasonable request at first glance. However, if the man's father had just died, the man would most likely not have been present. He would already be involved in the preparations. Some commentators argue the man's father was most likely old and thus the man is really saying that he wants to stay with his father until he dies. Perhaps the man was the oldest son, and it was his responsibility to bury the father or perhaps he wanted to be near his father to obtain his inheritance. Such a delay may have been years! Other commentators reference the practice by some Jews at that time of remaining near the body of the father for up to one year and then reburying the bones. Regardless, Jesus' response makes it clear that the man's request involves putting tradition or the man's own desires at a higher priority than following Him. Jesus' response to man is that he should leave the spiritually dead to bury the physically dead and follow Jesus to proclaim the Kingdom of God.

> *[61] Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." [62] Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*

The third case involves an "I will follow you BUT..." In this case the request seems reasonable but perhaps Jesus sensed some reluctance. Jesus uses the analogy of plowing. One cannot plow in straight furrows, particularly with oxen, if not constantly looking to the front. Jesus calls us to go forward and not look back.

<u>Reflection and Action</u>

The Gospel lection this week offers some fundamental lessons on discipleship. First, and like Jesus Himself demonstrated, discipleship involves a relentless commitment to His continued mission and purpose. Second, there is a worldly cost to discipleship. While this cost may not necessarily involve being homeless or walking away from family or livelihood, there is still a cost. Following Jesus must come first in the life of a disciple. This fact has changed little since Jesus' first disciples and is a consistent theme in Christianity across all periods and cultures. It is perhaps ironic that many churches today in our consumeristic and materialistic culture appear to have flipped the paradigm. No doubt beginning with all the best intentions, the consumerism approach to doing church has turned things inside out. Instead of Christ being at the center, the "consumer" is now at the center. The consequences of applying such a marketing approach to the way we do church has resulted in a transformation in how "success" is measured. Emotionally engaged consumers rather than spiritually engaged disciples appear to be

the goal. Instead of the cost of discipleship it is now more about the value proposition of belonging. The response to "*Follow me*" is now "*What's in it for me?!*"

In this week's Gospel lection, Jesus went out of His way to point out the true cost of following Him to would be followers. Jesus sought out disciples who could make disciples, not consumers. There were many consumers who sought out Jesus during His life but just a small community of 120 disciples remained after His death and resurrection. The Master's plan did not call for consumer-Christians then or now.

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