

Sermon June 26, 2022

Luke 9:51-62

We are living in unusual times in our country. We almost always have some kind of strife in our land; however, it feels more extreme right now. We've experienced mass shootings, congressional hearings about the "big lie", and now the Supreme Court has overturned decades of settled law regarding women's reproductive rights.

We might be angry. We might be frightened. We might feel relief. We might feel terror. We might be confused. We might be numb. We come together as a community in the wake of this shock in a place to hold all of these feelings, not to solve anything. This is a place to bring all of our feelings, all of our fears, a place to rest in a time of chaos, of cacophony. In this time of fear and conflict, come, rest. Come, rest: whether you need to cry or to be silent or to cry out. Come, rest: with your fears and your worries. This is a time for reflection. This is a time for us to come together. Hope will come. Action will come. Joy will come. But for now, just be and hear the story of God.

Jesus is being somewhat mysterious in the gospel today.

He sternly tells his disciples that they should not command fire from heaven to consume unbelievers. A village doesn't welcome him, and he simply moves on to another village. A convert says she will follow him, and he says, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests"—whatever that means. He invites a stranger to follow him. The stranger says, "First let me go and bury my father"—and then Jesus says, "Let the dead bury their own dead." And another asks simply to say farewell to his loved ones. To this one, Jesus says, "No one who puts a hand to plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of heaven."

Okay--Mysterious

He rejects retaliation or violence as a response to inhospitality, and he avoids conflict by simply moving on. But then he says something like, "If you wish to follow me, you must drop everything and everyone in your life. Just give up everything and follow me." So, just where is he leading? To Jerusalem, as it says in this passage. To his betrayal, crucifixion, and death.

Can he really mean this? Can our Savior be ordering us to put down our livelihoods, to put aside our relationships, and to abandon our property to enter pain, suffering, and the very jaws of death?

Well, it sort of depends on whether you see Jesus as someone to worship or someone to follow. So--- for today, let's consider that Jesus is asking us to follow. Truly following Jesus means leaving behind all our fears--- of scarcity --- limitations--- death.

Jesus isn't seeking a following just for himself. He's seeking followers on the path that he himself is walking. That path can be hard. It can keep us restlessly on the move; it can call us to a new life's work. An omnipotent God would probably just save us from ourselves. But, if we only worship Jesus without following him, we make him into a mere religion—instead of a journey toward union with God.

Fr. Richard Rohr tells us that just worshipping Jesus—makes us into a religion of “belonging and believing” instead of a religion of transformation. A religion of belonging and believing is concerned about who's in and who's out, about what doctrine people believe, and how they support the institution called the church. But a religion of transformation focuses on change. Changing ourselves into more of what God is calling us to be and changing the world around us into a more hospitable place for **all** of God's creatures.

What Jesus calls us to do is much harder work. We can be like Elisha and ask for a double share of Elijah's spirit. Or--We can wait around for the whirlwind to pull us into heaven. Or we can do the work we are given to do: to share love, to wage peace, to nurture kindness, to exhibit generosity, to seek faithfulness, and to strive for better self-control. In other words, to love God, to love our neighbors, to change the world.

This is what it is to follow Jesus, rather than just worship him. To seek, by word and example, to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly----- with our God. Of course, this path may lead us into whirlwinds or even through the valley of the shadow of death. But this path will also lead us from sin and death to the kingdom of heaven and everlasting life.

This path can leave the world a little better, a little kinder, and even a little safer. This path can leave us stronger, more spiritually fit, and better able to cope with the stress and trauma of the world. So, while we don't need to leave every possession and relationship behind, we could at least leave behind anger, strife, dissensions, factions. And then follow Jesus on the journey toward unity: union with others, with the world, with the universe, and union with God.

Jesus' promise to us is that we will inherit the kingdom of heaven, but he doesn't promise that we'll be free of difficulties. The spiritual life is not one without pain, without suffering, without challenge.

Oh--But what a leader! --One who never repaid anyone evil for evil.
One who sought only love. One who set his face on Jerusalem, knowing that what lay ahead was
torture and death.

And who one who renounced the glory of this world and turned away from covetous desires---
and then on the third day conquered death.

This is what comes of following Jesus. Not a mere religion of what's correct and what is not.
But a lifelong journey. A lifelong journey of transformation of ourselves and of the world around us. A
lifelong journey toward greater union with God.

And if we follow—instead of closing ourselves to **any** of God's children—we will open our
arms and ourselves to **all** of God's children.

Love God, Love your Neighbor, Change the World

Amen