

Luke 9:51-62

“When the Son of Man comes,” Jesus once said, “will He find faith on the earth?” Not if He looks into the Samaritan village in our text. They had no use for Jesus. They did not welcome Him into their town. We’re not told that they hated Him. There weren’t anti-Jesus posters plastered in all the store windows. They simply weren’t interested in Him. Perhaps they had ballgames to attend. Maybe their yards needed to be mowed. Perhaps they were just too busy pursuing other interests in life—running around on their four-wheelers, fishing, golfing, or making money.

“Shall we call down fire from heaven to destroy them?” asked James and John. No! That wasn’t how Jesus would respond to their lack of faith. He had not come to destroy sinners but to save them. He was setting His face to go to Jerusalem. He was heading for the cross. These villagers may have rejected Him, but He would die for them anyway. If they were to perish in hell, it’s not that they would perish without a Savior, but because they rejected their Savior.

When Jesus comes, will He find faith on the earth? Not if He looks in the hearts of those who do not follow Him. One man in our text said, “I will follow You wherever You go.” But he was all talk and no action. To follow Jesus means to deny yourself. “No one can serve two masters.” If we follow Jesus and serve Him, then we will not follow after the lusts of our flesh. We will not serve our wants and desires, but we will strive to be obedient to Him.

It should not be too easy to become a follower of Jesus. Some churches offer “one-or-two-week-wonder classes,” where they ease new converts into their church by just scratching the surface of the catechism. That’s not what Jesus offered the man in our text. “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests,” He told him, “but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head.” Jesus didn’t want a follower with shallow roots. If he was going to follow Him, he would need to be committed to following Him. But that commitment was not there.

And then we meet two other men in our text who were more committed to their families than they were to following Jesus. “First, let me go and bury my father,” said the one. The other said, “First, let me go back and say ‘good-bye’ to my family.” Jesus wasn’t being hard-nosed and uncaring to these men. He was calling them to be faithful to Him, but they were offering Him excuses.

The problem we see in our text is one which is wide-spread today...“I’ll follow Jesus, but on my own terms.” Very few couples today follow Jesus on His terms. Rather, they live in sexual immorality before marriage agreeing to follow Jesus, but only if He allows them to engage in this sinful way of life. But not only are they following something other than Christ; they pull others away from following the Lord by their immorality. Congregational members look the other way out of weakness, and refuse to proclaim the 6th Commandment to these couples. And parents put their children ahead of the Lord and His Word by saying: What they’re doing is not wrong—so many couples do it these days. And they become angry with a pastor who says otherwise.

But to follow Jesus on my own terms is not to follow Jesus. If we think we can follow Jesus while persisting in sin, we are not following Jesus. If you and I think we can follow Jesus but speak evil of our neighbor, then we're not His followers. If we think that we can follow Jesus and yet neglect the preaching of His Word and the reception of His body and blood, then we're not His followers. If a congregation thinks it can follow Jesus even while abandoning this teaching and that one, in order to attract more newcomers through its doors, then it has ceased to follow Jesus and is following the world.

If you and I are going to be Jesus' followers, then we're going to need to repent of our wickedness; of our petty excuses; of our disloyalty and unfaithfulness, and look to Him who followed the path to the cross for us. Jesus offered no excuses. He did not agree to go to the cross on His terms. He had no place to lay His head because it was destined to be crowned with thorns and to be laid in a cold, dark tomb.

When we watch our Lord follow the road to the cross, we need to understand something... He took that road for us, not because He saw something in us that was good; rather, Jesus followed the road to Calvary because we're such lousy followers. On our own we wouldn't follow Him for one hour, let alone one day. We're no different from the three men in our text and from the people in the Samaritan village; but unlike them, you are here today with your Lord receiving His gifts of forgiveness and salvation—because Jesus followed the path to the cross for you, and because He found you in your baptism, and He follows you through life to give you eternal life in His Word and Sacraments. We don't stay with Him too well in life, and so He stays with you, and keeps calling you back to His Word where He pours out His mercy upon you.

This text in Luke 9 hits us with the Law pretty well...you and I are better at making excuses than we are at following Jesus. And so hear this good news for you: Jesus forgives you. He is not calling down fire from heaven to destroy you. He calls upon His Heavenly Father to declare you clean of every sin. "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests," and you have in Jesus a place of refuge. He died for you, and therefore your God will not punish you. You can lay down your head each night in peace knowing that God is at peace with you for Jesus' sake.

Will Jesus find faith on the earth when He comes? Be assured by this—where Jesus comes, He gives faith. And He is coming to you here today in the preaching of His Word to call you to Himself and to place faith within you. Even if we have not been following Him very well, He forgives you and He is here in His Word for you to enable you to follow Him better. Even though you and I are so often disloyal and unfaithful to Him, He pardons your sins, and by His faithfulness to you—suffering, dying, and rising for you—He empowers you to be loyal to Him.

A week ago my family crossed the Mighty Mac—the bridge connecting Michigan's Upper Peninsula to the lower mainland. This five-mile long bridge was built fifty years ago. Before then the Upper Peninsula was remote and isolated from the rest of the state. But now, thanks to the Mackinac Bridge, that separation is gone and people freely come and go. And so it is with God and you. Jesus followed the road to the cross so that you would not live in isolation from God because of your sins. In your baptism Jesus became the Bridge which connects you to God, and through whom you now receive the gifts of His grace. The separation is gone. Your sins are forgiven. You do not need to follow after the

ways of the sinful world anymore. You are free to follow Christ Jesus in life—and not on your terms—but on His terms. And His terms are all about caring for you, and helping you to follow Him, and forgiving you every time you fail. May God, in His mercy, make each one of us such followers of Christ Jesus. Amen.