

Luke 9:51-62

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set towards Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, 'Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?' But he turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village.

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' 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.' To another he said, 'Follow me.' But he said, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' But Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.' Another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.' Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'

Ever since Christmas, we have been following the story of Jesus Christ in his earthly ministry. From his birth in Bethlehem through his baptism and gathering his disciples, we have heard about what Jesus did, and how he did it.

Now Jesus is setting his face toward Jerusalem. He is not merely "Purpose-Driven," as Rick Warren would say. He is focused like a laser. The entire rest of Luke's gospel is the story of Jesus going to Jerusalem and what he did when he got there.

Jesus is traveling with his disciples, his followers. This is more than the Twelve Apostles, or messengers. This is all his followers. It's a larger group, including men, women, and children. It's quite a crowd, big enough that they send messengers ahead when they're traveling, so that people can be prepared.

The harbingers of this whole crowd go through a Samaritan village on the way. Jesus has talked with Samaritans in the past. He will talk with anyone, and he does not seem to have a huge problem with Samaritans. They worship God on the mountain,

though, not in the Temple in Jerusalem. This means that they are not interested in hearing from Jesus, since he is so focused on going to Jerusalem.

We have a side note here. James and John are so offended on Jesus' behalf that they want to call down fire from heaven like Elijah, and burn the people of this poor village. Jesus, you remember, is God. He does not need anyone to defend him. He speaks sternly to James and John, and the whole crowd goes on to another village.

While they are walking down the road, one of Jesus' disciples tells Jesus that she will follow him wherever he goes. Jesus gives a somewhat cryptic answer to that, that he has no place to lay his head. Following Jesus is not a ticket to the easy life, and Jesus wants people who follow him to know at least some of what they're getting into.

Jesus tells someone else to follow him. The man replies, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." This is a big deal. One of the most important duties of a son to his father was to see to it that his father was buried properly. Some would say that it still is. Jesus is less sympathetic than we might have wanted him to be. He tells the man to let the dead bury their own dead, and to go spread the news that God's kingdom is at hand.

You remember, Jesus started his ministry by announcing that the kingdom of Heaven was at hand. He announced that God had sent him to bring good news to the poor, and to proclaim release to captives and recovery of sight to the blind.<sup>1</sup> Jesus tells this man that that's what he is supposed to be doing. If we are following Jesus, we should be spreading the good news. And, if the word we are spreading is not good news, maybe we should check what we're saying against what Jesus said.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 4: 14-30.

Jesus is headed to Jerusalem. He is not turning back, and he calls on us not to turn back either.

The problem is, we do turn back.

All of us.

Every one of us. We turn back just this once. We get distracted by this problem that we need to solve, or this thing that we want, or this person with whom we are angry. We forget that Jesus calls us. We forget what Jesus calls us to do. We forget who Jesus calls us to be.

Every single one of us does that.

The good news of Jesus Christ is not that I can stand here and tell you how to stop turning back. I can't.

Be wary of anyone who tells you they have a way to keep people from turning back to the world. They are fooling someone, whether they are fooling themselves or not. That's just not how this works.

The good news of Jesus Christ is not that Jesus is leading us to an easy life.

No, Jesus is headed to Jerusalem and the cross. If we want to be his followers, then we do not get to pick the destination. We need to follow him where he is going.

It's no ticket to easy street. It's a ticket to troubles and persecution. We will forever be out of step with the world around us, because, if we say, "Jesus is Lord," that

means that, ultimately, Caesar is not. That's true whether Caesar, in this case, is power, or popularity, or country, or money. You can only have one number one priority.

This is a journey that has no respect for our comfort zones. If Jesus does not challenge you and make you at least somewhat uncomfortable, then stick around. You've missed something. Jesus has more to say to you.

No, the good news is that Jesus never goes too far away for us to catch up. He knows that each of us may turn back a dozen times a day, and we turn back and run to catch up again. He knows that, and he calls us to follow anyway.

In these next forty days plus Sundays, we will talk about how we can turn back less. We will talk about how to do better when we run to catch up.

I invite you to join me, even knowing that this journey's destination is the Cross.

Each of us was created by God. God blew God's Spirit, the *ruach Elohim*, into dust and created us. Each of us will return to dust. That is not news, or it should not be news to any of us.

All the things we turn back for, whether they are money, or power, people liking us, or whatever they may be, will be dust.

This journey, following Christ to the Cross, is what matters. And it is not too late for any of us.

It is time.

Let us follow Christ, even knowing where he leads.

AMEN.