

# Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Des Moines, WA June 30, 2013

Luke 9:51-62

## Total Commitment

1. *What does it mean to be a disciple?*
2. *Three men desiring discipleship*
3. *Jesus was speaking to us: This is Commitment*
4. *Commitment to Christ is Different*

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All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

*As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.<sup>52</sup> And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him;<sup>53</sup> but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem.<sup>54</sup> When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?"<sup>55</sup> But Jesus turned and rebuked them,<sup>56</sup> and they went to another village.*

<sup>57</sup> *As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."<sup>58</sup> Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."*

<sup>59</sup> *He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."<sup>60</sup> Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."*

<sup>61</sup> *Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family."*

<sup>62</sup> *Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*

Luke 9:51-62

In our minds, we probably have a high standard in place when we hear the word disciple.

Undoubtedly, we go to the Twelve, specifically called by Jesus, to do great things and start the church that was founded on his work. Those men were disciples, but that special calling and ministry that Christ gave to them made them apostles, or men who were sent out, committed to the work of spreading the Gospel. To be a disciple is different. To be a disciple means that you follow. Disciples were also committed, but they were committed to spending time with Jesus, listening to what he taught, and helping him in whatever ways that they could. Jesus had many, many disciples while on earth.

You and I are not apostles, but we could certainly call ourselves disciples of Jesus. After all, we spend time with Jesus, we listen to what he has to say, and we seek to help him in various ways as we go through life. I would venture to say that we are all committed to Christ.

Today, in an account given to us by Luke, we see three men who came to Jesus, desiring to be his disciples. Each of these men's situations were different, and to each Jesus gave a different response. But their words for Jesus and Jesus' words to them say a lot about our own discipleship.

The first man that comes to Jesus makes a fairly simple statement. "**I will follow wherever you go.**" He seemed ready to follow Jesus.

But to that promise of discipleship, Jesus gave this rather cryptic response, "**Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.**" Jesus' words certainly come across as a bit over the top. Certainly, there was nothing simple about carrying out what he promised to do, but would he really have no place to sleep if he followed Jesus? As we consider those questions and try to figure out why Jesus would respond this way, we need to go back to the first verse of our gospel lesson. As Luke began this section, he reported that these men came to Jesus "**as the time approached for him to be taken to heaven.**" Jesus was also "**resolutely**" going to Jerusalem for the final time. That verse helps us understand why Jesus responded to this man as he did. Jesus knew that life as a disciple was about to get a lot more uncomfortable after his death. This man was claiming that no sacrifice would be too great. No hardship would be too difficult. Was he ready for that? Was he ready to go wherever his discipleship might take him? Jesus' words certainly were a warning that this man better consider exactly what it meant to follow Jesus.

The second man was actually approached by Jesus. Jesus gave him that familiar call that he had

once given to Peter and his brother Andrew. "Follow me."

Apparently, this man was willing, but not quite ready. First he had some important business to take care of. "Lord," he asked, "**let me go and bury my father.**" Though he came with an excuse, it certainly seems like a valid one, doesn't it? Perhaps, we wouldn't even call it an excuse. His father had likely just died, and this man wanted to do what most sons do, laying the dead to rest.

But listen to Jesus' response, "**Let the dead bury their own dead.**" Upon first hearing, those words certainly come across as callous and a bit insensitive. Was it wrong for this man, or any other, to take care of family who had passed? Does following Christ mean shunning all earthly responsibilities? Again, remember where Jesus was in his earthly timetable. For Jesus, time was of the essence. He did not have much time left before he died. He no longer had time to wait for disciples to figure out their priorities or take care of earthly duties. This call from Jesus was so urgent that it needed to be accepted immediately.

The third man who came to Jesus was like the first. He seemed to be ready to follow Jesus. However, his pledge of discipleship came with a but. "**I will follow you,**" he said, "**but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.**" Once again, this man's reason for not immediately following Jesus seemed like a valid one. In fact, it was the same request that Elisha gave to Elijah in our lesson from Kings earlier. In that case, Elijah acknowledged that it was good and proper for Elisha to say goodbye, but here, Jesus responds differently. "**No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.**" Once again, at first reading, Jesus' words seem fairly harsh and perhaps a bit rude. If nothing else, it completely contradicts what Elijah had done. Why would Jesus respond this way? What did he mean?

Once again, remember where Jesus was in his life. Focus was essential. Jesus was fully focused on the mission ahead and it needed his full dedication. That mission also needed the full dedication of his disciples. Think of how often Jesus urged his disciples during Holy Week to stay focused. He knew what was ahead for his disciples and he needed full commitment.

For each of the three men that came to Jesus ready to follow him, Jesus came back with a reason that they were not able to commit to him. As much as Jesus was speaking to those men, he was also speaking to us; people who see ourselves as

disciples, people who see ourselves as followers of Jesus, and people who see ourselves as committed. Jesus' words to these three men certainly make us think, don't they? If these men were not committed enough, what hope do we have of meeting Jesus' approval? If these excuses were met with rebuke, what would be the response to our excuses?

Through his words, Jesus was setting the standard for us who would call ourselves disciples. Total commitment is what Jesus demands. Commitment is not occasional; it is not convenient; it is not secondary. Commitment to Christ demands our life. Jesus was speaking to us as he spoke to those men, "This is commitment."

This is a difficult text for people who would consider themselves disciples because it shatters any thought that we might be worthy followers of Christ through our own will and dedication. It breaks down any source of pride that might be inside of us who follow while others do not. These men show us that none of us meet that expectation of total commitment. Yet, that is what Jesus demands

And Jesus would show us what he meant by total commitment just a short time after he spoke these words that day as he walked to Jerusalem. Don't you think Jesus' disciples must have thought of these words about commitment as they witnessed the events of Jesus' death? How could they not have thought about Jesus' comment about keeping the hand to the plow as they witnessed the walk to Calvary? Jesus committed to keeping his hand to the plow and he did just that, only it wasn't a plow, it was a cross. Jesus willingly kept his hands on that cross, even before they nailed them to it. Don't you think they thought of Jesus' words about not looking back as they witnessed him continuing to look forward, even as he saw Calvary ahead of him?

Jesus knew full commitment. Jesus lived with full commitment. Jesus died with full commitment. And who of us could ever be committed like that? Seeing Jesus' commitment and comparing it to our own can only make us feel worse about our own commitment and discipleship.

Thankfully, Jesus spent the time after he rose from the dead making it clear that the commitment that he showed as he suffered and died was not done so that we would know the level of commitment he expected from his disciples. Jesus did not live and die to be our model. He did not live and die so that we would know the standard that was there before us.

Jesus committed to that long and painful work to be our Savior. He committed to that work to free us

from every burden that Satan tries to put upon our shoulders. He committed to the work so that we would have forgiveness for every shortcoming in our lives. He committed to that work to take away the guilt that comes with every failure. Christ's commitment gave us forgiveness. Christ's commitment has given us freedom.

And that knowledge certainly changes how we view commitment, doesn't it? Commitment to Christ is different than the commitment that is asked for in any other religion that this world has to offer. We are committed to our Savior, not just our leader. Our commitment is motivated by love, not a fear of failure and punishment. Our commitment is fueled by what Jesus has done for us, not what we can do for him.

For disciples of Christ, there doesn't need to be any hesitation to totally commit. We know that Christ is totally committed to us. He has shown us that through the work he did to save us; and he continues to show his commitment to us each and every day as we live as his committed disciples. And that total commitment from Christ is what is most important. Amen.