

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, Wash.  
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*Luke 9:57-62*

**Count the Cost of Discipleship!**

1. *For realism*
2. *For proper priorities*
3. *For total dedication*

**Hymns: 53 – 707 –  
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All Scripture quotations from the NIV

*Luke 9:57-62 –*

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

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

*Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*

Would you like to take a trip to the moon?

Wouldn't that be neat if NASA called you up and asked you that question? Perhaps they're starting a program where they'd like some general citizens to be involved in the space program for publicity.

And they select you to be one of the new astronauts!

I know that there are folks here who would say, "How exciting! That's great! I'm ready and willing." But others of you might not be so sure. "Hold on a moment," you'd say. "Give this some serious thought."

Some commitment will be involved if you really want to make this trip. You will have to:

- Enter an exercise program that will be demanding, so your body is in top shape.
- Change your diet to a healthy one.
- Spend a lot of time preparing. You will need to know the basics of the controls and procedure for the spacecraft.
- You will need to learn whatever duties they might like you to perform.
- Prepare yourself for the danger involved. Your life will be on the line on this dangerous trip!

Do you really want to do this?! Maybe not!

Jesus raises the same questions for us today. We have past the high celebration of the birth of Christ. We may even have started feeling some of the "Christmas letdown" that might occur after the big day. Are you going to keep following Christ? I know the answer that you're ready to give immediately: "Sure! Yes!" But Jesus today has thought-provoking words for some prospective followers in Luke 9.

**So today, along with these men long ago, let's hear the encouragement of Jesus to "Count the Cost of Discipleship!"**

1. For realism
2. For proper priorities
3. For total dedication

**1** — Luke writes, “*As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, ‘I will follow you wherever you go.’*” This was a willing volunteer ready to sign up for the band following Jesus! He gave Jesus an indefinite promise to follow wherever Jesus would go. In Matthew’s account we’re told that this man was a scribe. That’s surprising news to us, because he was of the ranks of religious leaders who rejected Jesus and fought against him during his ministry. He probably had been attracted by Jesus’ astonishing miracles and his authoritative teaching. Jesus certainly would welcome this authoritative figure into his ranks!

Luke continues, “*Jesus replied, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.’*” Jesus tells the man to think again. Don’t be hasty! Is he sure he’d like to follow?

What kind of life did this man envision if he placed his hopes on the flashy miracles of Christ? Glory? Honor? And surely a full belly of bread and fish every night! Jesus tells him to get real and think twice. Jesus reminds the man that he is homeless. He lives in poverty. Yes, he had friends who took him in at various places and even a budget that was kept by his treasurer, Judas. But he did not live in luxury. He was a wanderer without a home address.

To make matters worse, Jesus would even be rejected at many places he’d go. This man should consider that life with Jesus was not about comforts and possessions! It was not about luxury and

ease. He should prepare himself for tough times.

Do you want to follow Jesus? Sure, right? Hold on. To those who would offer hastily, Jesus says, “*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*” (Matthew 6) He also reminds us, “*Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*” (Luke 14) Being a follower of Jesus and a member of his church will not automatically result in monetary rewards and comforts in life.

One of the great heresies of our times is a teaching called “Prosperity Theology.” This teaching promotes the philosophy that if your faith in God is strong enough, you will be rich and comfortable and healthy and all your troubles will melt away. Now it certainly is true that God has promised to take care of his believers and provide their daily bread. They will never lack anything they need! But the promises of riches and a carefree life in this world is not ours. In fact, we will need to be prepared to leave it all behind.

We see examples of this in the lives of the disciples that Jesus called. Levi, later called Matthew, was a tax collector. Luke tells us in chapter 5, “*Levi (was) sitting at his tax booth. ‘Follow me,’ Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.*” He didn’t see the need to stuff his pockets before he went. In that same chapter, Jesus caused Peter to have a great catch of fish. Peter is astonished and declares himself unworthy to be near Jesus. What does Luke tell us these fishermen did

after this? *“They pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.”*

Perhaps some of you have seen this in the way church finances go. How many years in your life have you seen your congregation well above the receipts and offerings needed for its annual budget? Conversely, how many times have you heard someone speak to the congregation or send a letter out that pleaded with people to remember to support the ministry of their church so it can pay its bills?

This is not an encouragement to let your church operate in this way, but it is a reminder that **Jesus teaches us that fabulous wealth and glory will not be the norm in this life for his followers. Count the cost for realism!**

**2** – A second man is involved in our reading today: *“(Jesus) said to another man, “Follow me.” But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”* Jesus gives an invitation to this man. Literally, he tells him, “Keep following me!” In Matthew’s account we learn that this was one of Jesus’ disciples. It was not some casual observer. He was giving one of his own followers encouragement.

However, the disciple shows that he has second thoughts. He’d like to go bury his father. This sounds like a reasonable request, doesn’t it? Yet we hear, *“Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”*

Does this sound harsh to you? How could Jesus not be in favor of him going to bury his father? Jesus certainly is not dismissing the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment. He himself was obedient to his parents. But the

disciple’s request may not have been as simple as it first sounds:

- Usually they buried their dead on the same day as the death, but what if this man wanted an extended mourning opportunity?
- What about his period of uncleanness involved?
- What if he would be delayed in the estate settlement?
- Or what if the man’s father had not even died, and he was asking Jesus for the time to take care of his father in old age, lay him to rest, and then he would be willing to come and follow him?

We learn more when we consider the setting of Luke 9. In the next chapter Jesus is going to send out 72 followers as missionaries on a preaching trip. This doesn’t seem to be the time for an extended leave of absence. So he tells him literally to “keep heralding” the kingdom of God and not to worry about burials at this time.

In fact, Jesus makes a statement that seems rather harsh at face value: *“Let the dead bury their own dead.”* This is a play on words. Jesus tells him the spiritually dead can take care of that! After all, they’re big on ceremonies like this. Perhaps this father had not been a believer of Christ when he was alive. So Christ appeals to a higher calling that he had for this man. There are lost souls that need to hear the gospel. **This disciple needed to realize that there were demands for total dedication for him to be a follower of Jesus.**

Do you want to follow Jesus? Sure, right? Hold on. Count the cost. This is a time for serious questions:

- Will you count your chief priority as being the proclamation of the gospel in your life?
- Will you count it your most important task to further God's mission in the world?

If you're eager to say "Absolutely!" to that question, examine yourself over the past Christmas season. Whom did you invite to come with you to church? Or at the least, what candid conversations about Jesus did you have with someone who is misguided about the reason for Christmas? It's your chief priority in life, right? How did you take advantage of one of the highest, most joyful Christmas festivals to proclaim the gospel message?

Another good question to ask is: What's your view on what it means to be a "church member?" Consider how an individual might join a congregation under the impression that he's in a position where all spiritual nourishment will be fed him, all the blessings of the church be granted, and he needs to just sit back and relax until the angels take him to heaven. But suddenly things change. He is asked to serve on the Board for Christian Education or the Board of Trustees. Suddenly a request for his time is made. He finds out that people have planning sessions and meetings to carry out much of the church's ministry. He wasn't prepared for this. He only wanted to be a twice-a-month churchgoer, not make a big commitment. **Count the cost! Jesus teaches us that we need to have proper priorities in the vital work that needs to be done before the end of time.**

**3** – A third man is involved in our reading. Luke tells us: "*Still another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go*

*back and say good-by to my family.'*" Again, this sounds like a logical request. Jesus surely would grant it to this man to go and bid his family good-by!

What does he answer? "*Jesus replied, 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.'*" Are you surprised at his words again? Jesus gives him a warning about being distracted from the commitment to follow him. Think about this man's family for a moment. What might their reaction be to his announcement that he's going to go follow the prophet from Nazareth?

- Perhaps they would object
- Maybe they'd try to talk him out of it, or at least beg him to take some more time in his deliberation
- Perhaps they'd forbid him to do it

Many a prospective worker for God's kingdom has been discouraged from offering themselves for service:

- Many a high school student interested in MLC has not had the support of their family –
  - "Why would you go to colleges so far away?"
  - "Why are you thinking about an occupation where you will not have a great deal of money? How will you take care of me and your mother when we're old?"
  - "There probably won't be any calls out there when you graduate."

- Many a pastor or teacher has been discouraged from types of service:
  - You're thinking of taking a call to where? You don't want to take a call to a church that far away. Are you going to leave us?"
  - "How can you even think of taking that call to a foreign country?"

Jesus tells this man that when it's time to plow, it's time to be totally committed to the task at hand. A man in the process of plowing can't be constantly looking in another direction. It's "plow time!"

It's much like a serious athlete in college or pro sports. When the ball is tipped, it's time to forget about the price of gas or their investment portfolio. It's not even time to try to remember what their mom is wearing in the stands. It's tip time! No distractions.

Do you want to follow Jesus? Sure, right? Hold on. Count the cost. Jesus asks for total dedication. What will happen when distractions come creeping in?

- What would distract you from worship in God's house? Your job schedule? Your hobby?
- When it's Bible Class time, will you be tempted to regularly say, "It's brunch time!"
- When a Voters' Meeting is coming up, might you be tempted to say, "Other people will be there."
- And when your decisions at the workplace or at home during the week become difficult because of your faith, what will you do?

### **Jesus says, "Count the cost!" Being a disciple of his involves total commitment.**

So after all of this, how and why would anyone say "Yes" to Jesus? This discipleship stuff sounds more involved than the trip to the moon that we originally began with – And it is.

Our motivation to keep following Jesus long after Christmas and even to the end of our lives is found right before our sermon text. There it says, "*As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*" The King James translation might be familiar to some of you: "Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem." It's also reminiscent of the OT verse where Jesus has a face like "flint" about his mission. He is headed for Jerusalem to suffer and die. He will not be deterred from his total commitment and his dedication to us. He will be our Savior. He will suffer and die. He will pay the price of the world's sin. He will save you, no matter what!

This dedication to our salvation is our motivation and inspiration to follow him now. The strength we need will only be found in the Word of God and the sacraments he has given us. What an encouragement to continue to receive this strength in our church and our homes as we vow to follow Christ throughout this life!

Go to the moon? Let's follow someplace even better. Heaven! And may the Lord who dedicated himself to us give us the strength to follow where he has gone! Amen.