

Will you follow?  
Psalms 16:1-8; Luke 9:51-62  
June 27, 2009

“Jesus **said to him, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks** back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:62) As most of you know I was raised on a farm. My grandfather had a large white horse, named “Dick,” that he would use at times to pull the plow. He preferred using the horse for the plow because he believed that he gave him more control. He could feel **the land under his feet and he could feel the tension of the** animal’s body pulling the plow. Dick was a beautiful white stallion, who absolutely hated me for reasons unknown. I tried telling my grandfather this and even my uncles would explain that the horse just did not like me. One day while playing in **the fields I heard my grandfather and uncles yelling, but just** assumed they were yelling at each other. I just remember a hand grabbing me and my flying in the air only to then see Dick on his hind legs **and coming down and catching my uncle’s** shoulder with his front leg. He had actually been charging at me and with my back to him I had no clue of what was happening. My grandfather, who thankfully witnessed this entire event, had actually been yelling at me **to run. After seeing that I was not doing anything to provoke the attacks** by Dick, my grandfather made the decision and did in fact sell him that very day. He made the difficult decision to give up the animal he had so enjoyed and to use his tractor for plowing instead. My grandfather did not allow himself to get distracted, however, but kept on farming and planting and providing for our family. In the process he chose to keep me safe from an animal that for unknown reasons rejected me.

In today’s gospel lesson **we have Jesus being rejected by the Samaritans for what** would seem to be no apparent reason other than he was Jewish. The Samaritans despised the Jews. The Samaritans were a mixed race of people that had settled in Palestine while many of the Jews were in exile and had inter-married with the native Canaanites. Adding to the bitter **divide between the two groups, the Samaritans had formulated their** own religion, which was a mixture of Judaism and various other cultic theologies. The divide was so deep that even

Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, they did not trust them, would not eat with them, and refused to touch anything that a Samaritan had touched. This divide was so deep between **Samaritans and Jews that the Jews in the North would go** miles out of their way, east of the Jordan River [to circumvent Samaria], in order to get to Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>

Our gospel lesson today tells us that Jesus “face was set toward Jerusalem.” (Luke 9:51, 53) Some believe this is why the Samaritans did not receive him. James and John sought to defend Jesus by calling down **fire to consume the Samaritans as they understood Elijah** had done against those who rejected him. But Jesus rebuked the disciples for wanting to seek vengeance to defend his honor. He reminded them that his ministry was not about an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth. Jesus had taught the disciples earlier in their journey together, **“Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake** the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.” (Lk. 9:5) Whereas the disciples knew the word of God, they had not yet accepted the spirit with which to live it out. When Jesus rebuked them it was as if he was saying to them, “You do not know what spirit you are of.”<sup>2</sup>

As Rev. Kenneth Samuel states, the Word of God without the Spirit of God is dangerous and deadly. The Word of God **without the Spirit of God gave religious sanctions to** slavery in America. The Word of God without the Spirit of God has caused women through the ages to be treated less than equal to men. The Word of God without the Spirit of God has caused humankind to believe that dominion over the earth grants permission to destroy natural habitats, **causing the extinction of many animal and plant species. The Word of God without the** Spirit of God has given religious sanction by some to deny equal rights to our sisters and brothers who identify as same gender loving or transgender. The Word of God without the Spirit of God has enlisted many Christians in a **crusade against our Muslim sisters and brothers.**

(Kenneth Samuel)

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Dr. Kenneth L. Samuel. “Jesus and Rejection”; Luke 9:51-56. April 24, 2005

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

God is not just word, but God is Word made flesh. The Bible is our guide to God and it serves to guide each of us into a loving relationship with God and into loving relationships with **one another.** <sup>3</sup> **That is what Jesus is teaching us today. With his face towards Jerusalem ,** Jesus is focused on his mission. He does not allow the rejection of the Samaritans to deter him from the call of God upon his life. Jesus was secure enough in who he was and what God was calling him to do that he did not allow himself to get distracted by the rejection of the Samaritans or the wrong spirit of his disciples. **Let us learn from this. We must “keep it moving,”** as my friend always says. We are called to share the Good News with others and there will be times when people snicker at us and reject our efforts, but we must continue. We must continue to **share the life and teachings of Jesus because they help us to grow** in our relationship with God, our relationships with one another, and our relationship with all of creation.

Bonhoeffer says there is a cost to discipleship and we see that in Jesus response to the three persons he encounters in today’s pericope. He says to one who asks to follow him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of God has nowhere to lay his head.” (Lk. 9:58) In the spirit of **God we know that there were those willing to offer hospitality to Jesus,** and what he is saying to this person is that you will find this journey difficult and you are not always going to be welcomed by those with whom you are trying to share God’s love and God’s message. There will be times in which you will not find rest, but instead turmoil and perhaps even threats to your life. There is a cost to discipleship.

To another, Jesus initiated the call to follow saying, “Follow me.” But this person had a reason for not following, **didn’t he. He responded by saying he needed to go and bury his father.** Now, our text does not provide much detail here. We are not sure that the man’s father is already dead or if he simply wants to stay home to honor his father with a proper burial when his time does come. Further, “the practice of primary burial (in which a corpse is placed in a

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid

sealed tomb) was followed by a secondary burial (following a twelve-month period of decomposition the bones were collected and reburied in an ossuary or bone box.) Mourning following a death was typically seven days but could last for as long as seventy. Jesus knew the time this man was asking for to bury his father, but he also knew that his own time was limited. Thus he says to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you go and proclaim the kin-dom of God.” (Lk. 9:60) Jesus is clear in this exchange that he wants this man to “follow” him and he wants him to “go” and proclaim the kin-dom of God. We are to follow **Jesus, and to go and proclaim the Good News to the world without thought** of what others might say even if they are the people who are the closest and dearest to us.

Jesus’ message is also that the journey before us will not be easy, but we must be willing to follow him proclaiming the Good News of God’s love and God’s kin-dom with others. We see that there is yet another person who says he is willing to follow but he wants to first go and say farewell to his family. Here **Jesus responds, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kin-dom of God.”** (Lk. 9:62) You see if you don’t keep your eyes straight ahead you can’t plow a straight row. Further if you don’t keep your eye on the horse and keep the plow handles steady you can actually be pulled across the plow. **You fail as a farmer if you do not keep your eyes on the target in front of you.** We must be clear about the direction that Jesus is calling us to go and keep moving in that direction. Truth be told we all put our hands to the plow and look back and it is the gift of God’s grace that helps us refocus on our mission, should we choose to accept it.

Jesus, in our pericope today, “confronts us with the truth that we’re not as committed as we’d like to believe. **Our desires for comfort, wealth, even family, get in the way of our promise to follow.**”<sup>4</sup> Something to note here is that the Aramaic word for “follow” does not mean to follow behind. Rather it means to be shoulder to shoulder. It means “Do this with me.”

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<sup>4</sup> Brett Younger. “Learning Together”; Luke 9:51-62. Good Preacher.com

We must ask ourselves what keeps us from truly following the teachings of Jesus. Is it that we are afraid of the difficulty and discomfort in the journey? Do we fear rejection? Do we not follow because we have not spent enough time in God's word and are ill equipped to share the **message of God's kin-dom with others? Do we start to follow, realize the cost, and then decide to turn back?**

“We learn to follow Christ when we feed the hungry, care for the sick, and help the [poor] make lives for themselves. We learn to follow Christ when we defend the rights of our **GLBT sisters and brothers, when we defend the oppressed, refuse to stereotype,** and build friendships across cultural and religious lines. We learn to follow Christ when we talk about faith to people who may snicker, invite friends to church, and pray for those who are lost. We learn that love, not time, heals all wounds. We learn that we can always pray for someone when **we don't have strength to help them in any other way. We learn** that life is tough, but God is always with us. We learn that when we follow Christ, Christ walks beside us.”<sup>5</sup>

Following Jesus is hard; there will be times in which we will not be welcomed. We will be rejected. And although Jesus has made it clear that we are to walk away dusting our sandals **off during those times, he is equally clear that we are to keep** moving and to follow.

Following Jesus requires that we not only know the word of God but live it in the Spirit of God. There is a cost to discipleship. We are called to put our hands to the plow and not look back, but look straight ahead and walking shoulder to shoulder with Christ sharing the Good News of God's kin-dom with **everyone. It is in following that we grow in our relationship with God,** grow in our relationships with one another, and grow in our relationship with God's creation.

Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid