

Readings  
Luke 9:51-62

### **All In**

When I first read today's passage from Luke I didn't like it. In fact I still don't like it and I am still struggling with what Jesus has to say - especially to the person who wants to go bury his father. All I can think is have a little compassion Jesus, I can guarantee you that if I am burying my father I will take the time to mourn and grieve and be with family and I would expect each of you to do the same. And yet, I think I might have a slight understand of what he means at least this is what landed for me.

This passage of scripture is all about following Jesus. It's about being disciples, and being disciples is usually not as easy as we make it out to be. At least that is what I'm reading, and the more I've studied scripture and followed Jesus the more I have come to believe that. Jesus never asked us to worship him. He asked us to follow him, to do and be as he is and does. We in modern day North America, we make discipleship easy. We make it about coming to church for an hour on a Sunday morning, following some rituals and listening to story. Jesus makes it about a complete and utter change of heart and life.

We modern day Christians often fall into the trap of bigheaded arguments that discern how and where we worship. We make our decisions about who's in and who's out. We spend our time and energy focused on the right way to do worship, on the right way to 'believe' and we fail to follow the one our faith is named after. One author writes "Our worship and creedal quarrels have resulted in divisions. Following Jesus would result in unity with diversity."<sup>1</sup> More people would be comfortable with the language and experience of belonging to the 'kingdom of God' if it is was about following the Jesus way rather than about the institutional way. The institutional church is good but it is not the one kingdom of God. Following Jesus is not about head thoughts its about life change, its taking your heart and throwing to the other side of the fence and living completely differently. Norman Vincent Peale wrote "Throw your heart over the fence and the rest will follow."

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://preachingtip.com/archives-year-c/pentecost-year-c/proper-8-year-c/>

Our heart of faith is meant to go where Jesus leads. If Jesus says love our enemies, we love. If Jesus says visit the sick, we visit. The list is endless on the calls to a life of discipleship. There is hardly a page in the Gospels that does not point the way for us to go where we have never gone before, where Jesus has gone before us. I firmly believe there is not just one way. We don't need to argue about the right way. This scripture reminds us that Jesus calls each individual to a different ministry and path. It's the whole image of the fullness of the body of Christ. I may be called to be the arm and you are called to be the hand, the hand is much more successful if it works with the arm. Each of us likely has a special unique path Jesus wants us to follow. Why do we judge other peoples path or journey so much? Our particular trail might be difficult. I think that is why Jesus has different responses for each of the followers in this gospel. But the one same response he gives is, no excuses - if you say you want to follow, then follow. Just do it. All are welcome to be a follower, all are welcome but being a disciple is not easy, it requires every part of you to engage the journey.

And even when we think we have got following Jesus figured out Jesus will challenge us once again. We live in a world that pursues certainty. We live in church and congregations that pursue certainty. We get so focussed on knowing exactly what things will look like that we loose faith entirely. Peter Enns calls "the need for certainty a sin" he calls it a "sin because it works off of fear and limits God to our mental images. And God *cannot be* boxed in."<sup>2</sup> "Enns is responding to the need on the part of some to hold fast to correct doctrine, but doesn't being faithful to God require our complete attention? Shouldn't we be all in or not at all? Isn't look back and wondering if we're on the right path problematic? Look what happened to Lot's wife! So, if you're going to follow Jesus, really follow him, shouldn't you abandon your previous life and embrace him solely."<sup>3</sup>

The disciples in our story were certain they had following Jesus figured out. So certain that when others did not follow the right way, when they spoke against Jesus they were ready to call fire down from heaven and consume his opponents. They know who Jesus is, they have seen his power, they have watched him calm storms and heal broken, they have even witnessed him raise the dead. So they are committed and they are willing to destroy anyone who isn't. And yet when Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem the heart of his mission and ministry begins. James and John have a sense of that and so when the Samaritans reject Jesus they want to

---

<sup>2</sup> [The Sin of Certainty](#), p. 19]. Enns

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bobcornwall.com/2016/06/dont-look-back-lectionary-reflection.html>

destroy them. But they have forgotten an important piece as they have walked with the messiah. They have forgotten that over and over Jesus has confronted oppresses forces and welcomed the outcasts into the fold.

This struck me this week. It struck me because I have been saddened over and over in the last few weeks by the us and them mentality that is flourishing wholeheartedly throughout our world. Why is it that when others resist our way of thinking and being, we first view them as opponents and then want to remove or even destroy them? I don't really get it, it's not gospel, but it seems to be human nature. The reality is "original insecurity comes before original sin"<sup>4</sup> The reality is most of us are insecure, vulnerable beings and so we seek peace from certainty and control. We don't get peace that way but we try over and over and over again. If you don't understand just look at the political arenas of our day.

David Lose writes "This world is chaotic and dangerous, and there is much of which we are legitimately afraid. Too often, in response to these fears and insecurities we believe that in order to be safe and prosper we need to control whatever and whomever is around us. And, like children who have never quite grown up, when things don't go our way, we howl with outrage and fear. Not always, of course, but enough to do serious damage to ourselves and others. This becomes all the easier when those who are not "cooperating" with us – that is, don't see things the way we do or do what we want – are different from us. Our tendency to label someone as "other" – whether in terms of their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, political preference etc. – confers a sinister permission to treat them differently, even to regard them as less than human, or at least less human than we are."<sup>5</sup>

Just look at the evil that comes from anger because people think and feel differently from us. Lose continues "The Orlando shooting was a stark example of what happens when this kind of fear and insecurity-driven hatred is combined with readily available military-grade weapons. In that case it appears it was sexual orientation and ethnicity that made people "other" in the mind of the aggressor. A year ago in Charleston it was skin color... We see this same tendency to label, exclude, and even remove or destroy in some of the fear-driven political rallies of this election season and in the call to exclude those who are different from us."<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/06/pentecost-6-c-gods-alternative/>

<sup>5</sup> IBID

<sup>6</sup> IBID

And...Before we get too cocky as Canadians let me remind you that it was not long ago we were arguing over whether a woman could or should wear a Niqab. It is in our not so distant church history that we made decisions to rip aboriginal children from their parents, families and homes so that we could teach them the right way.

“My friend Debra Bowman wrote “I think Brexit has revealed to us the split along ages and income and education and achievement versus aspiration, a split that threatens to be our undoing. We see the same split in the United States with the attraction of Donald Trump. We see the retrenchment of goodwill, the hunkering in and down as people are frightened for their future, feeling left behind. Vast numbers of people are experiencing globalization as a chipping away at their quality of life, and they don’t like it one bit. Vast numbers are blaming these unsettling times and growing economic inequity on immigrants, on refugees, on anyone who is different from the people they grew up with. There is an ugliness that is rising up from below the surface and spilling out into the streets. ‘Make America White’ again is a billboard that one politician has felt perfectly reasonable to have erected in public. People feel it’s OK to beat and harass women in hijabs, to murder indigenous women, to cry out racial slurs at men wearing turbans.”<sup>7</sup>

We see it in our world and we see it in our churches every day. So many of the conversations we find ourselves in as ministers become really stressful because people are upset about the way someone else thinks, worships, or believes what God is calling the church to. And in a place that is supposed to be about following the one of peace and grace we create enemies amongst us. Jesus rebukes the disciples for their intolerance. It is one of the messages I personally hear most clearly from Jesus. His whole life and mission are a rebuke of this tendency to solve problems by violence, to define people as different, and to assume that some are in while others are out. Jesus’ response to the chaos, limitation, and vulnerability of this world is not to deny it or try to control it or defeat it, but rather to embrace it, to offer love and grace and acceptance in the face of it...even to the point of death. Jesus is about unity within diversity.

I personally believe that Jesus death and resurrection has little to do with an abstract ‘forgiveness of sin’ and a whole lot more about God’s promise to enter into the chaos and fear, to stand with us through all the fear and bring us out the other

---

<sup>7</sup> Bowman Debra, Penultimate Word - I'm on a bit of a rant  
No More Excuses: Luke 9: 51 – 62

side to abundant life. The antidote to fear isn't control and power its faith, courage, compassion and grace.

And that is not the way of our world and that is why when Jesus calls us to discipleship he is pretty blunt in this passage letting us know it won't be easy. You are going to have to do things differently, no more excuses. Jesus challenged their level of commitment. Reading a passage like this from the perspective of living fairly comfortably challenges us to ask am I really willing to give my all?

But Jesus says: Don't look back, don't make excuses. The kingdom demands all from us. Are we ready to go forward, or will we continually look back? Do we let ourselves off the hook by simply equating this call to not look back and direct the disciples of the day to walk with Jesus to the cross? Or is this a call for us to fully engage in the work and life of discipleship today? I know what I think it means.

Let me share a little more of Deb Bowman's sermon for Ryerson this morning. She asks "Are we as Christian community being called to speak more vocally and more urgently about the global inequities and the destruction of our climate? We act as if we have all the time in the world...we'll just get the redevelopment sorted out, and the amalgamation, and then our governance and our integration as a new community if indeed we go in that direction. And then, we'll talk about becoming an Affirming, openly LGBTQ friendly congregation. But after the events in Orlando I feel like Jesus is saying 'No, not later, NOW!' Let the LGBTQ community know they are welcome here, and let the neighbourhood know that that's what you stand for. In the rising signs of racism and fear of the other and scapegoating that we see reflected in Brexit and in the United States, I think Jesus is saying follow me NOW, not when it's convenient, not when you've got all the seniors' programs sorted out and all the family ministries organized and the perfect strategic ministries document and all the Ryerson neighbours onside and the City of Vancouver in support. Set your face to Jerusalem now, get out the pride flags, meet with the Muslims and the Mosque, to heck with Revenue Canada and limits on seeking God's kingdom and justice, and start plowing straight ahead."

And I'm not saying it is an easy message but I can only imagine what this world would look like if we truly engaged in the kind of following that Jesus demands of us. Imagine a world of unity, grace, compassion and trust over what we have displayed for us in our world today.

Holy God lead the way.  
Amen.