

Sunday 26th June 2022
Trinity 2 (C)

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: 1 Kings 19.15-16, 19-21

NT: Galatians 5.1, 13-25

G: Luke 9.51-62

In today's Gospel the long and hard journey of Jesus continues from Galilee to the capital city. We see Jesus on his journey to establish a new relationship between people and God: "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem." So, leaving Galilee, Jesus enters Samaria and continues toward Jerusalem. Not all understand him and many abandon him because the demands are enormous. Then three would-be followers met Jesus. Each of the exchanges involves a challenge from Jesus, which are challenges for us to wrestle with as we consider what it means to follow Jesus.

Following Jesus is foundational to what it means to be a Christian. And what it means to follow him is laid out in these three brief encounters in today's gospel reading. Three times we read the word follow to describe what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. The first man says I will follow you. Then in verse 59 Jesus takes the initiative and calls another, "Follow me." Then a third person says, "I will follow you, Lord." The third person, like the first person, says that he will follow Jesus. Like the second person, he asks for permission to do something first. In some ways the would-be followers want to place conditions on their following by saying "I will follow you, but first..."

In our reading, Jesus elaborates on the cost of following him with three conversations. The scripture teaches that discipleship is all about discovering our deepest fulfilment as human beings that is in spite of who we are and that is despite our brokenness. We are made compatible with Christ by the love of God who wants nothing more than to walk along with us on the way. The gospel does

not record the response from these three would-be disciples. We are only left with the question which Jesus intends for us as well.

And so, when you think about the word discipleship, what comes to your mind? It is a word that is so familiar to us. It's part of the Christian vocabulary that we use. We find in our passage today some of Jesus's hardest sayings on discipleship that challenge how we think about what it means to follow him. And you probably already picked up on the rudeness with which Jesus speaks to these three candidates. Why does Jesus issue a challenge with the call? Jesus did not leave a temple, but he left disciples and discipleship is costly. A theologian writes- Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship; and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.

Jesus was utterly honest in telling people what it would cost to follow him. Was Jesus being harsh and rude to his would-be followers? Not really. We are free to decide whether we will take the path which Jesus offers. While many of us may not need to give up the comfort of our own home to follow Jesus, we, however, must be willing to part with anything that might stand in the way of doing God's will.

One of the greatest challenges for every Christian is to follow Jesus, and to pursue his purpose for our lives without looking back. Imagine trying to drive a car while looking in only the rear-view mirror; we'd be challenged to stay in your lane. We should focus on what is ahead. Jesus surprised these three people with the harsh truth that nothing should hinder us from following the Lord. The positive and undesirable aspects of our lives have the potential to become distractions. Previous successes, past failures, internal insecurities, friendships and may be our professional work. Jesus'

illustrations of ploughing a field would have made perfect sense to his listeners living in an agricultural context. If a farmer did not focus on what is ahead but was distracted by what was behind, it would be impossible to plough in a straight line. I don't know whether you've ever noticed that Jesus was good at taking something ordinary and making a serious point from it.

The message of this unusual story is that following Jesus means the kingdom of God takes priority over everything else in your life. Following Jesus means serving the purposes of love, justice, reconciliation, and freedom because it's the right thing to do. As St. Julian of Norwich taught, do the right thing regardless, and God will redeem your motives. We shouldn't think that this trusting God, this willingness to give up all for God, is somehow an act on our part that will make us worthy and put God in your debt. Putting God's love means sensing God's love and giving love in return. It means doing good because we love it and want to, not because we are obligated to.

There is a saying, "There's no such thing as a free lunch"? This saying arose from American pubs in the early 1900's that offered free lunch. But the food was often high in salt so the people would become thirsty and buy drinks. They ended up paying for their meal in drinks. Thus, the expression, "There's no such thing as a free lunch." The lunch wasn't free, there was a cost. This expression sums up the feeling that nothing in life is free. There is always a cost. We're often suspicious of anything that's free because we feel there is always some catch. God freely gives us his grace and mercy because Jesus has paid it all. Jesus paid through his suffering and death on the cross. The call to follow Jesus is costly, and it's also grace because we are called by the one who has counted the cost of loving us, who hasn't delayed in his love and who never looks back.

In today's gospel, the whole episode is shaped by the fact that Jesus is determined on reaching Jerusalem, where he will be brutally crucified to make atonement for the sins of the world.

Jesus' words in today's Gospel are a timely reminder as we examine where we are in life, what path we have been following and where our God would have us walk forward. True Christian faith is a dynamic journey, a pilgrimage. The pilgrimage of faith is full of chitchat, fun, transformation, and opportunity. As we journey through life and in faith so we must always look forward to the future.

In his book on discipleship, Peterson writes, "I have never yet heard a servant Christian complain about the oppressiveness of his servitude. I have never yet heard a servant Christian rail against the restrictions of her service. A servant Christian is the freest person on earth."

I don't think for one moment that Jesus was refusing to let the men follow him and I don't think he would want the man to lose touch with his family and friends. I think this is about saying to him - If you're following me, do it with complete sincerity and commitment. Fix your eyes on me and don't let the short-term joys and adventures of the world draw you away and ruin your relationship with me.

Revd Tabitha Rao