

Luke 9:51-62

Third Sunday after Pentecost

June 26, 2022

Groups have noted the lack of volunteerism. Service organizations don't have enough workers to maintain what they have been doing. Local fire departments and emergency medical services are understaffed. As a result they look to paid workers, but will they be able to find an adequate supply in the current job market? Community events die out because few people want to help out.

We are not here to point fingers at others and wring our hands at the apathy and self-centeredness that may cause these conditions. We come to examine our own hearts and our response to the Savior and his work for us. We urge

FOLLOW JESUS IN SERVICE

- I. With patient determination
- II. With wholehearted devotion

Jesus certainly showed patient determination as he dealt with us. That determination was there despite the obstacles he faced. "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." He had come to this world on a mission. Luke mentioned his being "taken up to heaven." Lots of events had to happen before that time and they were not easy. He had told his disciples how he would be mocked and flogged and crucified. He told them he would "suffer many things." There were all the horrors we relive each Lenten season as he was unjustly arrested, mistreated, abused and mocked. Ultimately he would suffer death on the cross. He also knew the victory that he would achieve and so he was ready to be on with it. He set out resolutely, Luke reported, literally, "set his face" to proceed. Disciples had objected but he would hear none of it. He was determined, with a resolve based on his love for us.

There were others accompanying the disciples at this time. Preparations were needed for such a group so he had sent word to the Samaritan village they were approaching, "But the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading to Jerusalem." Their refusal had nothing to do with an inability to host a group of their size. It was because Jesus was going to Jerusalem. There was bad blood between Jews and Samaritans. The Samaritans traced their heritage back to stragglers of the northern ten tribes of Israel that had remained after the Assyrians conquered them and took most of the population into captivity. Others the conquerors relocated from different countries and a few may have moved in on their own. Each group had their own gods and after intermarrying they became a

mixed race and religion, retaining some elements of the biblical faith (they accepted the first five books of the Old Testament, for example). Samaritans had their center of worship on Mt. Gerizim, but he was passing by as if it meant nothing and going on to the rival city Jerusalem.

"When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, 'Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?'" They knew the Lord and cared about him. This rejection disturbed them. They were ready to teach these people a lesson. They may have thought the Bible gave them a precedent, present in a variant reading to this text. Near the end of the time of the prophet Elijah, King Ahaziah of Israel, a follower of the false god Baal, was injured. He sent messengers to the Philistine idol regarding recovery. Elijah called down fire from heaven that destroyed the groups he sent, multiple times. James and John assumed such action would be appropriate here and were more than ready to have at it.

Their suggestion earned them a rebuke from the Savior. That was not his way. The situations were different. The king was a hardened unbeliever ripe for judgment. These Samaritans were misled but there still was hope. Remember Jesus can read hearts and also knows the future. He didn't want anyone to cut off their opportunity to come to faith. Dead people can't be converted.

God's kingdom does not operate by force. The Savior wins souls through gospel preaching. There is later proof. In the book of Acts we learn of the spread of Christianity to Samaria. Phillip, one of the deacons appointed to assist the apostles, was especially active there. Peter and John later joined him. They performed miracles. There was a great response among the people.

We can commend the zeal of the pair but not their method. Jesus seeks to save the lost, not destroy them. There may be a gap before the results come but patience is a characteristic of Jesus. Look how he deals with you and me and our weaknesses, doubts, fears and inconsistencies. He doesn't immediately condemn us or zap us with a thunderbolt from heaven but invites us to come to him and waits for his forgiving grace to take effect. He builds us up and strengthens us in faith. Here's a place where he would say, "Go and do likewise." Here we see, "They went to another village."

Be glad that the Lord is patient but determined. He accomplishes his work because he is not deterred by opposition nor by taking the easy way out. He is patient, waiting for repentance and faith. Follow him in service, showing the same traits as

you witness, share his love and repeat efforts. The Spirit will produce the results in his time.

## II.

As he showed focus and persistence, so his followers need to be filled with wholehearted devotion. Three individual encounters were recorded by the evangelist Luke. The first teaches us to count the cost. A man came with an eager offer. "As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.'" Great, right? Not so fast! Make sure you know what is involved. Jesus alerted the man to the conditions he would encounter while accompanying him. "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." Jesus and his disciples had not existed in poverty and deprivation. There were people who supported them. There were sufficient funds to have a treasury (even if Judas pilfered from it). Opponents criticized him for eating and drinking. They called him a glutton and a drunkard, although I'm sure they exaggerated the situation in their hatred. But he did not have a regular place of residence and surely no money invested in a bank account or the stock market. He traveled about the land, constantly on the move, and stayed wherever was available.

The potential follower needed to realize the conditions and not be carried away by a moment of enthusiasm. He needed more than the feelings of the moment. Faith requires a foundation if it is to last.

The second encounter shows us that wholehearted faith prioritizes the gospel. The next man Jesus invited to follow him. He was likely already a believer. Others had received such a call from Jesus. Recall the immediate response of Matthew to leave his tax booth and how fishermen left their nets and came with him at once. "But the man replied, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.'" We would likely sympathize with him. Families are important to us. We appreciate our fathers and set aside last Sunday to do so.

Again Jesus knows hearts, situations and outcomes. "Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.'" His father's time of grace was over. His eternity would not be affected by the type of funeral received. There were people still alive needing the gospel. How many of them would die without hearing it and be lost if the man was not out there telling of the Savior and his forgiveness? There was urgency to the gospel work. Souls were in jeopardy. Teaching the gospel is work number one. Let nothing interfere with it. Discipleship involves denial of self and earthly ties. The Lord calls for wholehearted devotion, not divided loyalties.

Following Jesus in service focuses on the goal. The next man showed a desire to serve but also offered an excuse for delay. "Still another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.'" Isn't that what Elisha did in today's First Lesson? Not exactly. His farewell involved dispensing with earthly distractions, making a break with his past life and work.

The Lord's reply framed the issue, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." Would his family have tried to talk him out of accompanying Jesus? Would tears at the good-bye tug at his heart and sidetrack him from the work? A complete break was needed. The Master made a comparison with plowing. Focus is needed to make a straight furrow, especially for a beginner. Looking over your shoulder will make you wander like a track runner who looks back at the competition and slows the pace. Remember the importance of the goal. Souls and eternity are at stake. The Apostle Paul showed the right attitude regarding his salvation when he wrote, "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Nothing is more important or valuable than getting to heaven.

Did you notice that in none of the three encounters did Luke report the outcome? Do you think the men followed Jesus or not? The absence of their answer allows us to ponder how we would react. Do I show a shallow, emotional response and then fall away when the going gets tough? Do I place personal concerns first over God and his place in my heart? Do I allow rivals to compete with the Savior? Do I look back with fondness or do I make a clean break with the past?

No doubt at times we are guilty on all counts and more besides. We are thankful that our patient, determined Savior won forgiveness for all our sins, that he saved us from sin and rescued us from the hell that we deserved. He redeems, renews and restores. As his forgiven child, follow Jesus in service with joy and blessing.