

Call to God's Kingdom

Luke 9:57-62

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⁵⁷ As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.'

⁵⁸ Jesus replied, 'Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'

⁵⁹ He said to another man, 'Follow me.'

But he replied, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.'

⁶⁰ Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.'

⁶¹ Still another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.'

⁶² Jesus replied, 'No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.'

Have you ever encountered a merchant who is trying to sell you any goods or services, so that you will purchase these? He praises his goods and services in many ways, but ignores the weaknesses, shortcomings and challenges relating to the deals offered. Perhaps such merchants are not honest: they know the shortcomings but do not want to tell about them. Sometimes a merchant really does believe that what he is selling is without flaw.

Something the like might certainly happen to an enthusiastic believer, usually only to someone who has just come to faith. He tells of the glory Jesus has brought to his life because he has been forgiven his sins and granted eternal life. That is a great happiness and joy. Faith is a great treasure and a pearl that you should sacrifice your

whole life in order to find it. And no challenge, misery, sickness, or anything else is of the kind that you would forsake this treasure!

But in this Sunday's gospel text we just read, our Lord Jesus wants to be honest, to this man – and perhaps also to us: if you go to Jesus to follow, it will not be just like dancing on a bed of roses; life in the kingdom of God will not be without hardships! By following Jesus, we will face many challenges and difficult situations in our lives. Even sickness and the loss of loved ones. And finally, in the face of death, we may be in the situation as Job, who lost his possessions, had to give up his loved ones – but did not lose his faith in God.

At the moment we die, we cannot take anything from here with us. No goods, no glory, no fame. Only Jesus and God and the Holy Spirit are with us.

In the text we read, Jesus encountered three persons who could become his followers: The first one said, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus saw his over-eagerness and sinfulness, and said, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Jesus did not prevent this man nor denied him to become a follower, but told that following Him comes along with challenges and a cost.

Jesus talks about the same thing according to Luke 9:23: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." Carrying ones cross does not mean physical illness or other normal life-threatening hardships; but carrying ones cross refers to the trouble that comes to you and me as we want to be Christians, followers of Jesus – that we will obey God's good will in our lives.

For it will be difficult when we want to do it right, when we want to be honest and when we want to express our love to all people: it is much easier to go through life

when living only for our own benefit. You will be much more popular when you go along with the mocking and blaming choir according to the current public opinion.

Following Jesus means to die for our own selfish desires and lusts, to redeem the old Adam in us. And that every day - as Jesus said, "take up your cross every day".

Therefore, it is also said: God only has one-day old children: ever day we must turn from our wicked ways and repent, and rely on the grace of Jesus. Every day we must follow Him, not our own or others' selfish wishes.

Then Jesus comes across another man along the road. Jesus called the man to follow Him, but the man hesitated and asked to first bury his father. Of course, it is good to take care of our family obligations, and to be part of the funeral of our loved ones. Jesus himself taught to honour our father and mother!

Why then such a response? I think that Jesus saw that this man was making false pretenses: the burial of his father was just an excuse to refuse. Jesus apparently saw that this man was in danger of being preoccupied with earthly worries, which effectively prevents doing God's good will.

We can easily come up with one thousand and one good reason why God's good will should not be done. In our lives, many good things in themselves, do prevent us from dedicating ourselves to the most important thing: sometimes good things as such can lead us to pass by the most important thing in life.

Jesus gave this other man a new mission: "Go and proclaim the kingdom of God!"

The kingdom of God is joy and peace in Jesus Christ, for there we are forgiving each other, helping the weak, going alongside with our fellow human beings, healing the sick, and even raising the dead.

Then Jesus encounters a third man, who also hesitated to follow Christ: He was mindful of the polite oriental way of that time: "I follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family." To this man Jesus wanted to answer in the same as to the previous one: the old and new cannot be mixed in the wrong way. Good and bad cannot be combined; no wrong compromises should be made!

Jesus wanted to say that new life cannot be lived with old rules. You cannot return to the former: not to selfishness, self-interest, bitterness, unforgiveness, hate, evil. Jesus answered to the third man: "No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

This is a tough response from our Lord Jesus who certainly wanted to love every man he encountered! Have you ever made any wrong compromises? Is the word of Jesus perhaps stinging sharply in our hearts? Did you look back to the former? Who can follow Jesus wholeheartedly? Who can refrain from looking back when facing challenges in life? Who can follow Jesus in all things, really in all things? Who can share Jesus's fate until the last, until death?

I think no one of us in our own strength! I am quite sure that none of us is capable of this. In many of these things that our Lord has set us as an ideal we come short at meeting these. Our shortcomings, however, do not justify us to ignore our Lord's words. The law of God and the word of God remain unchanged forever. We must not bargain His goodness – it is not to be compromise at all.

We humans are not perfect, but our holy and righteous God still demands from us perfection! God cannot accept any sin or impurity or any imperfection - because with all this we have hurt and spoiled our fellow human beings and ourselves and God-created beautiful nature! God cannot accept our wickedness.

Our only help is the Lord Himself! He came to overcome our shortcomings, our sicknesses, our sins, and atoned for these on the cross.

Our Lord Jesus, on our behalf, led a perfect, God-worthy life. He suffered for us the punishment that would have come upon us for our evil deeds!

Only Jesus followed the good will of God without looking back. Only He lived a life where He did not make compromises with evil. Only He followed God's good will wholeheartedly. Therefore: Only when we rely on our Lord Jesus, who atoned for our wickedness and sins, God regards His holiness and purity for the sake of my and your holiness and purity.

Into this kind of following, Jesus and God wants to call us today: to live every day according to His example; and wherever we come short of His example, that He encourages us to trust that we can leave all to His forgiveness and Holiness, over and over again, every day!

Let's pray: Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, for giving us an example of how we should do right in our lives and love our fellow human beings. Thank you that in Your care we can safely learn how to take up our cross and follow you - because in all that we come short, You are our righteousness and our sanctuary before the Holy God. This is why we praise and thank you - with confidence in our hearts we want to follow your path. Thank you for calling us to your wonderful and eternal kingdom. Amen.