



Conversation with a Savior: The Disciple

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 8

5:30 pm, Saturday, June 25, 2016

8:15 & 11:00 am, Sunday, June 26, 2016

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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Luke 9:51-62

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

It seems to me that, in general, human beings like to belong . . . to something. Human beings, in general, are social creatures. Admittedly, that varies from person to person. Some of us are extremely outgoing, and have never met a stranger. Others of us nearly die of embarrassment if someone says "Hello" to us. Most of us, though, are probably somewhere in between, somewhere along that spectrum. And we *want* to belong. We want to be a part of something: community, club, organization, action group, alumni, car care, cooking group, sewing club, book readers, altar care, ushers, lawn and gardening care, computer club, golf buddies, What Ever!

Again, I realize that what we belong to or join varies from person to person. Some of us want to join in with everything that comes along our way; others of us are content to be part of maybe one or two organizations or communities. But humans, in general, want to be a part of, want to belong to, in some way big or small or in the middle, **something**.

And when we're a part of something, and we're really enjoying what we're a part of, we tend to want others to know what a great time we're having being a part of that club/ group/ organization/ whatever. And, often, we want others to join us. Because we're enjoying what we're doing, we think others might enjoy it as well.

You'd think that would be especially true of someone who is trying to spread the message about a new religion. Well, not really a *new* religion, but a new *understanding*, no, make that a **better** understanding of a belief that had been around for a long time. So isn't it interesting that, in our gospel reading today, that when it appears that Jesus has conversations with *Three Different* people seeking to join up with him, he almost completely shuts them down, turns them away.

Our passage begins with kind of almost disaster avoided. Jesus and his crew were heading south towards Jerusalem, and they come upon a village of Samaritans. When we think of Samaritans, we tend to think of the parable of the Good Samaritan, which we'll get in a couple of weeks. What we generally **don't** remember is that Israelites and

Samaritans get along about as well as the gangs the Cripes and the Bloods. For Jesus to enter a village of Samaritans is about like governor Tom Wolf trying to join in on a fund raiser sponsored by the Bush brothers. That's what is meant there in verse 53:

⁵³ *but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.*

We'll get to that "face set toward Jerusalem" part in a moment. But the disciples don't act much better than the villagers:

"Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"

Destruction is avoided because Jesus says 'no'.

Then we get our three encounters. First one: someone more or less runs up to Jesus out of the blue and says "I will follow you wherever you go." Okay, that sounds pretty good: somebody wants to join up. Admittedly, we don't know a whole lot about this individual. We don't know if this is a man or a woman, youth or adult, nothing. Still, this person wants to join up. And how does Jesus answer? "Sure, come on along"? Does Jesus say "What are your qualifications to be part of my organization?" Does Jesus ask about previous affiliations? No. Jesus answers with what I can only call a total and complete off the wall statement:

"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

What does that even Mean? Does it mean that Jesus is a homeless dude; that he doesn't know where he's going to sleep. What does that have to do with someone who is willing to drop everything and be a follower?

The next one, Jesus addresses a guy, in the same way he got so many of his disciples. Jesus simply says "Follow me." The guy replies with an answer that, I think, feels pretty valid:

"Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

That feels like a valid request, except that we don't know if his father just died, was in the process of dying, or if dad was simply old and he wanted to spend what remaining time dad had with him. If dad had just died, then it would actually be another twelve months before dad's remains would be ready for burial – remember, first they put a body in a tomb for twelve months for it to decompose, and when that is done, the bones are gathered up and put in a special box and then *that* is what is buried. So it could be that this fellow was asking for a year's reprieve before he started up with Jesus (and Jesus, with "his face set toward Jerusalem," knew he didn't have a year left). We don't know.

Jesus' response *could* be seen as mean, almost cruel, if not outright snotty:

"Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

At least he was encouraging the guy to proclaim the message of grace, love and forgiveness.

And this last fellow?

"I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home."

This sounds like what Elisha asked of Elijah in the Old Testament reading. Elijah said Okay, so why wouldn't Jesus? This fellow just wants to say goodbye to his family. Couldn't he have done that first, though?

Again, Jesus' response is kind of off-putting:

"No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Since most of us aren't from an agricultural background, this might be a bit difficult to understand. We need to remember that there are the animals pulling a plow, and you need to keep looking forward in order to plow straight. If all you're doing is looking backwards, your furrow is going to be crooked. You have to pay attention to where you are going.

So what is all this supposed to mean? We have some straight forward stuff here, but Jesus' responses are like he really does **not** want these folks to be a part of the team. And I rather wonder if that's not the point to these answers. Jesus has his "face set toward Jerusalem." We, the readers, know that this means he's heading into what we now call Holy Week: where he's greeted as the new king on Sunday, arrested Thursday night, and dead by Friday afternoon. Jesus **knows** this is coming. He **knows** life will not be easy for his followers. There will be a cost to belonging. There is a cost to being a disciple.

Interesting thing about belonging, about being a member. Do you know what it takes to continue your membership here at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in Camp Hill, PA? To *become* a member here, we ask that you go through a six-week orientation session, where you meet most of the staff, the other folks who are looking to join, and some of the other members. But what is required of you to *remain* a member, in order to be eligible to vote on issues brought before the congregation? You need to have received communion **and** made a financial contribution, *both on record*, for the current or previous year. That's it. You have to sign in on the **Worship Witness** book, and put a dollar in an envelope and put your name on it, once within a twenty-four-month time span. That's it. That's all you have to do. Doesn't seem like all that much to me.

When I think about being a believer, I think that *faith* involves a whole lot more. I think that *following* Jesus means we give of our **time**, our **abilities**, and our **finances**. Now I have to say, I don't think Christ is expecting all of us to pledge our entire incomes to God, and devote every waking moment in service. *Although*, how much better would the world be if more of us did that? On my day off, I am not certain the world was made better because I chopped down a bunch of weeds in my back yard, rather than tutored some struggled kids, or helped serve a meal at Bethesda Mission. I have to think, do I *really* need a smart phone, FIOS internet at home, along with cable TV and a land line? Am I being fiscally responsible with all that?

So, what if we changed the requirements here at Trinity in order to remain a member? What would we change them to? That you have to attend so many times a year? That you need to be involved in “X” number of activities, or give a certain amount of time each month? Do we want to put a minimum on the financial amount necessary to remain on the rolls?

Well, no; we don't want to do any of those. In part, because they are so difficult to quantify. But mainly because Christ doesn't do that to us. That's what I think these answers are about. It's *difficult* to be a follower of Jesus, to believe what he preaches, to help those in need, even those folks whom we don't necessarily like or want to help. It's *difficult* to give of our time when we're already stretched with work and home, doctor appointments and soccer games, vacuuming, cooking, eating and sleeping, when do we even have time to simply *relax*?

Yet Jesus ask us to give of our time. To worship. To pray. To help those in need. To sit with a friend undergoing chemo. To drive an acquaintance who can no longer drive to the grocery store. To listen to someone who simply needs an ear. And Jesus asks us to give of our abilities. To help set up for a church meal. To work on the finances of the church. To tutor kids who are falling behind, or simply need a little extra push. And Jesus asks us to give of our finances. To think about how often do we really need to go out for dinner, or can't we pack our lunch a few days a week and give that extra to the ministry of Christ? What am I spending my money on, is it necessity, or luxury, or unimportant?

But it all comes down to, what does it cost to follow Christ, to truly be a disciple? Is it a cost I'm willing to pay? Is that a path I'm willing to walk? And that is something that each of us have to decide for ourselves.

Amen.

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