

Pentecost 3C (6/30/2019)

1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21

Psalm 16

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Luke 9:51-62

Jesus' standard for faithfulness is so lofty, who can measure up? The call to follow him is a call to give everything. But the one who calls us is worthy of our devotion, going ahead of us in every risk, every loss. If we give everything, we give it for the sake of the one who gives everything for our sake.

At such a decisive turning point in Luke's Gospel – at the moment that Jesus concludes his ministry in Galilee and “sets his face toward Jerusalem” – it's no surprise that we have an opportunity to reflect on what it means to follow him. We know what's in store for Jesus in Jerusalem, and we know what's in store for faithful disciples in any age who come face to face with hostile power. **The cross is always in view for those who are drawn to follow in the way of Jesus. And, isn't that terribly counterintuitive?**

Jesus has no comfort to offer would-be disciples in our Gospel today. *You intend to follow me?* he asks. “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” That is, *follow me and you'll discover that you have no place to call home, either geographically or culturally.*¹

You intend to follow me? “Let the dead go and bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” That is, *follow me and you'll discover that the demands of discipleship supersede your other obligations.*²

¹ Richard J. Shaffer, Jr., in *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Vol. 3, 194.

² James W. Thompson, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Vol. 3, 195.

You intend to follow me? “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” That is, *follow me and you’ll discover that faithfulness requires an undivided loyalty and focus; there’s no going home again.*³

Who would willingly submit to these criteria? Isn’t it reasonable for even the most ardent disciple to expect a basic standard of living, to honor the memory of her loved ones, to attend to her closest relationships? But, Jesus is unequivocal. “If any want to become my followers,” he insists earlier in chapter 9, “let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”⁴

The rigors of discipleship are not lost on biblical interpreters. Consider the following summations of today’s Gospel:

“[Jesus is] calling and he wants a straight answer now. You’re in or you’re out. He makes it clear that answering his call and living the life of discipleship requires no less than *everything*.”⁵

“In order to have true meaning and integrity, [discipleship] must be our identity; we must recognize and live it in every part of our being.”⁶

“Commitment to discipleship leads to a testing of loyalties on every front.”⁷

“Discipleship can tolerate no conditions which might come between Jesus and our obedience to him.”⁸

³ Matt Skinner, http://www.workingpreacher.org/brainwave.aspx?podcast_id=1162.

⁴ Luke 9:23.

⁵ <https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources#resources>.

⁶ Shaffer, 192.

⁷ Elaine A. Heath, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Vol. 3, 194.

⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, <https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources#resources>.

Jesus' standard for faithfulness is so lofty, who can measure up? And yet, **from generation to generation he has called disciples to bear witness to God's justice and mercy, pointing the world to the cross and resurrection as signs of God's solidarity with a suffering world and the hope of something beyond our suffering. What is it about Jesus? Why have so many of us come to trust that his is the way to life, and life abundant?**⁹

Are you familiar with the phenomenon of imprinting in baby birds? Shortly after they hatch, birds form a lasting attachment to the first object they see, hear, or feel, and develop their sense of species identification from that attachment. Hatchlings usually imprint on a parent, and that parent teaches them to be a bird. Occasionally, however, they imprint on a human or other animal by mistake, in which case they permanently identify with that species. Regardless of species, however, the object of imprinting serves as the hatchlings' only source of refuge and care, ideally inspiring trust and a willingness to follow.

Can we reimagine what single-minded commitment to Jesus might mean in light of this metaphor? In other words, **what happens when we "imprint" on Jesus? How does our lasting attachment to him form us as people of faith, hope, and love? And, how does he provide refuge and care?**

Dear church, we often frame the call to discipleship in terms of the cost to us. But, what if we framed discipleship in terms of the trustworthiness of the one who calls? It's true that when Jesus beckons, he expects us to give everything, to

⁹ John 10:10.

devote our whole lives to his purpose. But, he is fundamentally worthy of our devotion, going ahead of us in every risk, every loss. **If we give everything, we give it for the sake of the one who gives everything for our sake.**

I'm reminded of a beautiful song in our worship resource that recalls the biblical image of Jesus as a mother hen.¹⁰ By way of conclusion today, hear the first two verses, and rest in the promise of God's love made known in Jesus, that we might imprint on him and conform our lives to his:

[“When Twilight Comes,” *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, #566]

¹⁰ Luke 13:34.