



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, JUNE 29, 2025
1 KINGS 19:15-16, 19-21; PSALM 16; GALATIANS 5:1, 13-25; LUKE 9:51-62

WHY WOULD ANYONE CHOOSE THIS LIFE?

***Luke 9:51-62** [When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But he turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village. As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."]*

Happy Pride Weekend for those who celebrate. I guess it's fitting that I am your preacher today since I am a proud member of the LGBTQIA+ community. I wish I could give you a robust and inspirational "Pride" sermon today, but the readings have led me elsewhere.

This season of Pentecost is all about growing in faith and learning to become a better disciple of Jesus. This is how the Spirit continues to form us. But, gee whiz, our Gospel today doesn't ease us into the

invitation to discipleship. No. It's confrontational. It's demanding. It's offensive. In it, Jesus asks us to surrender absolutely everything, and he does so without apology. In fact, he gives the people around him every possible reason to say "no." So why would anyone say "yes" to what Jesus is offering? The cost of discipleship is high.

The challenge of the readings this week is: if we want a way of life that's soft and cuddly, Jesus's way isn't it. If we want a God who will respect our priorities; honor our social,

cultural, and economic boundaries; and keep our lives neat and orderly, Jesus is not that God. If we want a spirituality that's comfortable rather than costly, and stable rather than transformative, we should walk away now. Because Jesus's face is set like stone for Jerusalem. For sacrifice. For the cross. Yes, he bids us to follow. But he bids us, in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's chilling words, "to come and die."ⁱ

Luke records four interactions between Jesus and his would-be followers in this week's Gospel. Take a deep breath, for this is what Jesus is inviting us into:

Rejection and forbearance. The Gospel passage opens with a group of Samaritans refusing to welcome Jesus into their village. Though Jesus expresses a desire to minister, teach, and heal in their midst, the villagers reject him outright. The disciples want to burn the offending village to the ground but Jesus "turns and rebukes them."

The call, Jesus reminds them, is to bring life, not death — even to those who reject and insult us. Rather than acting out of anger and hurt, the call is to practice forgiveness and forbearance, never retribution and revenge. The call is to face each other with great patience, because even the people who make our blood boil are precious to God.

For Jesus, rejection is a given. Wounded feelings are part of the journey to Jerusalem. What matters is how we respond when we are wounded. What matters is

whether love or hatred ultimately governs our hearts.

Jesus is inviting us into a life of inconvenience and hardship. As Jesus continues his journey, a passerby calls out to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." But Jesus says to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

Is Jesus promoting homelessness? Maybe. He certainly is promoting inconvenience. Jesus offers no guarantee that the Christian life will be easy and comfortable. If anything, he promises the opposite: a reordering of our priorities that will feel risky and destabilizing. A surrender of our most prized possessions and preferences. An identity that isn't defined by the stuff we own, the clothes we wear, the degrees we earn, the awards we accumulate, or the cars we drive. A life that is messier, grittier, and humbler than the one we curate so carefully on Facebook.

But surely, Jesus is speaking metaphorically, right? Are we really supposed to denounce all these creature comforts to follow him? I don't know. This might be what you are called to. The answer to that question comes through prayer and discernment. Some people are called to live very simple lives in solidarity with those who have so much less. Others maintain a holy indifference about "things" as they focus on relationships and a greater call. I suggest you meditate upon this: Jesus, the Son of Man, *God incarnate*, spent his adult life homeless. No matter how squirmy

and defensive this fact makes us feel, we need to sit with it and ponder what it means for our everyday lives — as we discern our call to authentic discipleship.

Third, Jesus is inviting us into a life of disruption and disorientation. Soon after Jesus riffs on the foxes and the birds, he invites another passerby to follow him. The man responds, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus says, “Let the dead bury their own dead; as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

Ouch, that one hurts. My father died nine years ago this month. If Jesus had told me to not make plans and attend his funeral, I would have said, “see ya!” This is where, I hope, Jesus is speaking more metaphorically. He is testing all our loyalties. Maybe the point is that Christian discipleship requires a degree of detachment from every other commitment we have — to family, to tradition, to culture, to reputation, to social norms and expectations. These are important, of course, and they have their place, but they are not primary. Jesus is primary. Or he wants to be.

Jesus’ harsh-sounding words to the would-be follower suggest that there will be times when our faith requires us to violate cultural norms, or disappoint our families, or move against the grain of the broader society we live in. Discipleship *will* disorient and disrupt us. It *will* make us the neighborhood weirdos. It *will* shake things up in our families and friendship circles.

It *will* challenge the status quo. That’s what transformation is all about.

Lastly, Jesus is offering us a life of intensity and urgency. As our reading draws to a close, one more traveler on the road offers to follow Jesus: “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus’s response? “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Dang it, Jesus! We can’t even say *goodbye*? Well, no. Not if it causes us to hesitate. Not if it takes away our sense of urgency for the Gospel and for the world God loves.

Can I even count how many times I’ve offered Jesus a version of this last excuse? “Sure, Lord, I’ll follow you! I’ll give you everything I’ve got, I promise. But, um, not right now. *Later*. After I...”

After I what? After I finish these last few *super important* projects. After I find a spouse. And lose twenty pounds. And get over my dysfunctional past. And finish raising my kids. And buy a house. And pay off my grad school loans. And retire. And turn forty, fifty, sixty,

The list is endless, and that’s precisely Jesus’s point. If our to-do list *ends* with Jesus instead of beginning with Jesus, we might never get to Jesus at all. If we keep glancing over our shoulders in nostalgia instead of fixing our eyes on what lies ahead, we’ll never step onto the road that leads to Jerusalem. Spiritual fitness requires a sense of urgency and

passion. The passion we heard from Dean Thomason last week in his sermon. A sense of the sacred, irreplaceable value of *right now*.

Why would anyone choose this sort of life? Is it just too costly to follow Jesus? I don't know. People must be attracted to it. Do you realize that we have about 10 newcomers who visit our Cathedral parish each week? Many of them members of the LGBTQ+ community. They seem to be searching for a safe place to belong and serve, to follow Jesus in their unique way. Did you know that we have people discerning vocations to deeper ministry in the church? Some called to Holy Orders, some to marriage, some to missionary work, others to live in deep solidarity with the poorest of the poor and the sickest of the sick. Our transformation into Christ's image is a lifelong journey dependent upon the empowering grace of the Holy

Spirit. That grace, once attained, is a source of true joy and freedom, inviting us into a profound relationship with Christ.

Why would anyone choose this? Because these are the terms we were created for, and Jesus knows it. Jesus knows that this is the cure for our malaise, our boredom, our hunger, our angst. He knows how deep calls to deep within our restless souls, how something unrelenting in us aches for a life of purpose, a life of meaning, a life we can pour out in love until we are spent and reborn. This is the life of the Holy Spirit within us. A life of empowered freedom, found in service.

Jesus is hard on us because he knows that our hearts cry out for transformation. For renewal. For resurrection. Nothing else we buy will suffice. Nothing else the world sells can compare. So, Jesus bids us to come and die. So that we can really *live*.



ⁱ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, 1995. *The Cost of Discipleship*. Touchstone Publishing.