The Second Sunday after Pentecost (C), June 30, 2019

Luke 9:51-62 (esp. v. 57-58)

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In the name of the Father and of the T Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. The Word of God which engages us this morning is based on Luke 9: “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.’”

Twenty verses earlier, God himself showed up in his glorious cloud. "A voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!'" (Luke 9:35). Now we must ask, "*Is* anyone listening? Are *you* listening?"

What is Jesus saying? That he's heading to Jerusalem. That he's going to suffer and die, and on the third day he will rise. Jesus is saying that anyone who would follow him must follow in this, his path of suffering, death, and resurrection. "Is anyone listening? Are *you* listening?"

The disciples aren't listening. They've been too busy arguing with each other about which of them is the greatest (v. 46-48). They've been trying to stop anyone who's not in their own little group from healing people in Jesus' name (v. 49-50). They've been trying to call down fire like Elijah upon a village of Samaritans who aren't listening to Jesus, just like they aren’t (v. 53-54). "Is anyone listening? Are *you* listening?"

Jesus brings his Gospel of forgiveness, life, and salvation to the world—to anyone who will listen, and even to the mud-blooded Samaritans. Long ago, “those people” had rejected the God of Israel, and he rejected them right back. The Lord sent the armies of Assyria to capture them and scatter them around the known world—mixing the descendants of Abraham with foreigners. They intermingled and intermarried, despising the lineage of Abraham and God's promises therein. Later, they set up their own pagan temple in Samaria to rival the Lord's temple in Jerusalem. In Jesus' day, Samaria was like something between the sketchy part of town that people tried to avoid, and the Muslim countries in the Middle East to which we Christians dare not travel.

But Jesus does not avoid these lost and forsaken sinners. His Gospel is for all nations, and so his path to the cross leads right through this nation of mud-bloods. But the Samaritans will not receive him. In their pride, they are offended that Jesus is *merely passing through* on his way to Jerusalem. He dines with sinners and tax collectors, so he ought to stay with *them* awhile, they think. But Jesus is on the path of suffering, death, and resurrection, and he will not tarry. "Is anyone listening? Are *you* listening?"

Along the road, someone says to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go." "Will you really? Do you know who I am? Do you know where I'm going? Are you able to drink the cup that I drink? Listen to me: let me make sure you know what you're in store for. Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." He is rejected by the people who need him the most, like those Samaritans back there. Presumably, this commitment was too much for the man.

Jesus says to someone else along the way, "Follow me." Jesus calls this man the same way he called his disciples. But this man hesitates: "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Now, it's very likely that his father already was buried. You see, at this time in history, people would bury their relatives in two stages. First, they would put their body in a tomb, wrapped in linen and spices—as with Jesus. Then, about a year later, they would come back when only the bones remained. They would then put the bones in an ossuary (a box) and set this aside in the tomb. It appears that this second stage of burial is what this man was talking about. "Lord, let me first go and take care of this obligation I have to my dead father." Jesus replies, in effect, "Listen to me. Leave the dead to bury their own dead. He is in his tomb already; he's fine. As for you, follow me, because you have more important work to do. Go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Someone else says to Jesus, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home. After all, when the great prophet Elijah called Elisha to follow him while he was plowing in a field, he let Elisha go and say goodbye to his family first. So this is my condition for following you, O great prophet: let me go and do the same." Jesus replies, "Listen to me: something greater than Elijah is here. The kingdom of God is at hand, and anyone who wavers or turns back is unworthy of me."

What does it mean to follow Jesus? What is the cost? Who is prepared? "Is anyone listening? Are *you* listening?"

I hope so. I hope you're not just looking for an excuse to dismiss what Jesus is saying. There are no easy ways out here, and that's the point. Sure, we could say that Jesus is being overly dramatic to prove a point. We could say that he doesn't actually expect people to drop everything—their security, their responsibilities, their family obligations—to follow him. We could say that Jesus only wants to reveal how incapable we are of following him and that he doesn't actually intend for us to do it. But then, are we really listening? Are we taking Jesus seriously, or are we just reading between the lines for an excuse to plug our ears?

Now, Jesus *is* going to Jerusalem, on our behalf. He *is* going to suffer and die, on our behalf. He *is* going to rise, on our behalf. He will do all of this to save us from our sins—from our inability to actually follow him. Jesus is doing what we cannot. And now that Jesus has walked the path of suffering, death, and resurrection, so have we, in him. But this does not dismiss Jesus' call to follow him in this, his path.

What does it mean to follow Jesus? First, it means actually listening to him and to the witnesses whom he sends. The disciples and these three men struggled to do so. The Samaritans refused to do so.

Second, following Jesus means being aligned with him and his intentions. James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven. But Jesus rebukes them; they had the wrong idea. This shows us that, even when judgment against sin is called for, our Lord is, at times, more patient than we might like. God's patience is great news when we sinners are on the receiving end, and yet it's such a burden when it's our turn to share in his patience for others.

Third, following Jesus means knowing where you're heading. We follow our Lord in his path through suffering and death, and out the other side in triumphant resurrection. Make no mistake about it: if you actually try to live rightly and faithfully, having to trust in God for all things, then this sinful world will devour and destroy you. You're gonna get yourself killed, just like Jesus. But then… then you will rise again, just like Jesus. The path to resurrection leads through faithful suffering and death.

Finally, following Jesus means being resolute, focused, and single-minded. Jesus clearly told these three men that nothing should distract them: no discomfort, no delays, no family obligations. He required them to set out immediately and resolutely, just as he was going resolutely toward Jerusalem. Neither temptation nor rejection would turn Jesus from his path.

Dear friends in Christ, this is what Jesus requires of those who would follow him. Why? Because his path is the way of the cross. It is the way of suffering, death, and resurrection, for us. "For us" in the sense that Jesus does it perfectly on our behalf, and "for us" in that Jesus' path is also our path. Are you listening?

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.