

**When you walk with Jesus, sometimes you will be surprised by what you hear.** Oh, there are things that Jesus says that sound natural, that make sense, but then there are those times when you are walking with Jesus and he says the most outlandish things – things that make you stop and shake your head and say, “Really Jesus, are you sure about that?” To which Jesus simply says, “Yup, this is what it means to follow me.”

You see, that is the issue God’s word is addressing today – what it means to be a follower of Jesus, a disciple a Christian. In the Gospel, Jesus tells us what it takes.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. St. Luke says **the time was approaching for him to be taken up into heaven**, so “**Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem**” because he had a job to do. He was going to there to suffer and die for the sins of all, and to rise again for our salvation.

To get there he had to go from Galilee in the north to Judea in the south. There was a country in between Galilee and Judea called Samaria. One important historical fact: Jews hated Samaritans. And Samaritans hated Jews. Jews hated Samaritans so much that if you were a good Jew, you walked around Samaria instead of walking through it. It wasn’t a very big country, but it would add about 50 miles to your journey. 50 miles of walking in today’s language would be like me driving to Florida by way of Colorado because I hate Tennessee – this is a serious detour.

These people really did not get along. And I’m certain when Jesus told his followers that he wasn’t going to be walking around, but through Samaria there were some people in his group that thought, “Really Jesus, I don’t think that is such a good idea.”

They were also probably the ones thinking, “I told you so…”

You see what happened was, Jesus sent messengers ahead of him – this was a big group of people, Jesus, his disciples, and the crowds that followed, you couldn’t just drop a group like that on a little village in Samaria and expect them to be able to house and feed them – they needed advanced notice. Jesus wanted to let the village know ahead of time so they would be ready.

But Jesus was a Jew, and even though he was Jesus, they knew he was just passing through. He wasn’t coming there to stay in Samaria; he was on his way to Jerusalem. Well, one Samaritan village decided to make clear, “You are not welcome here. Go find your food and water someplace else.”

I’m sure there were a few people thinking, “Jesus, I told you so.”

There were some other people in that group that were thinking something else entirely - two disciples named James and John.

James and John were brothers. They were part of Jesus early followers. They were in Jesus’ inner circle. These two (plus Peter) were the only ones who got

to see the amazing Transfiguration of Jesus that had happened just a few days before this account.

Transfiguration, that amazing day when Jesus took Peter, James, and John to the top of a mountain and let them see him like they would see him in heaven – shining with all the power of God. Peter, James, and John watched him talk with two heroes of faith that had been dead (Moses and Elijah) about his upcoming departure from this world. They heard the voice of God the Father echo from the heavens saying, “This is my Son.”

And now this town won’t even welcome him? These Samaritans won’t give him food and water – the Son of God! Are you kidding me?!?!

Well, if they don’t want to welcome him, they don’t deserve him. They don’t deserve to live if they don’t welcome Jesus. “Jesus say the word and **we will call fire down from heaven to destroy them!** Let’s teach these people a lesson – Jesus you just say the word!”…

You know, James and John had great faith. They believed and knew that Jesus was the Son of God, and they were absolutely *convinced* that if Jesus said the word they could be like Elijah on Mount Carmel where fire came down from heaven and burned up the sacrifice and altar and showed that God is the Lord. They thought this was the right thing to do, what any good Christian would do. And so, they expected Jesus to say, “You’re right. Bring it. Burn them up!”

They had great faith, and they thought they knew what faith and following Jesus meant – they thought it meant being right, while the Samaritans were wrong, being on the winning side while the Samaritans were on the losing side. But…

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They were surprised when Jesus turned and instead agreeing, he rebuked them. He told them they were wrong. He told them they were sinning. They thought they were doing Jesus a favor, behaving like disciples should, but Jesus said, “Absolutely not.”

You know, as Christians living in this world, I think it would be very tempting for us to take on the attitude of James and John. To get frustrated with this world when it fails to treasure Jesus and from that frustration think that good followers of Jesus sit in judgement on the world.

It would be easy for you and I to get angry with the world when all it wants to talk about is gay marriage and who can go to the bathroom where – when God’s idea of marriage and sex is openly mocked and ridiculed and abandoned. It would be so easy to get angry with people who don’t have time for the Bible, and along the way they make sure to let you know that they think they are better than you for that very reason. It would be easy to think that good followers of Jesus distance themselves from the sinners who reject Jesus, good followers of Jesus call for those haters to get what they deserve.

James and John believed that.

But it turns out that James and John, you and I, we sometimes we fail to see the true nature of Jesus and consequently what it means to follow Jesus.

You see, Jesus turned and rebuked them because he had come to seek and to save, not to destroy. Jesus said, “Boys, if you think I have come to judge this world, no. I have come to give my life as a ransom for many.”

He was calling on James and John and you and me to look at the lost in this world with the kind of love that God has for them. Remember where Jesus was heading. He was heading to a cross. God loved the world in this way: He sent his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Which means, it’s not “us vs. them”. The true character of Christianity doesn’t ask God to come in judgment on those he has come to save.

James and John were disciples who missed out on the true nature of Jesus, and what it means to follow Jesus. I think that is a temptation for us. Jesus calls on us today to love the world with his kind of love as we follow him. Which means instead of defensiveness when the world rejects us, love. Instead of anger when the world turns its back on Jesus, mercy.

I imagine in this group, when they heard Jesus rebuke James and John (the inner circle) everyone’s ears perked up.

Jesus took this opportunity to teach what it really means to follow Jesus. And he did this through three guys – three would-be-disciples who walked up to Jesus.

The first guy walked up - and according to St. Matthew he was a scribe, so he was one of the experts in the Old Testament, he knew his Bible well – he walked up to Jesus and said, “**I will follow you wherever you go.**”

Pretty good statement, right? It’s a statement of whole-hearted commitment from a guy who knew his Bible well (a prime candidate for discipleship we would think). And yet, Jesus finds something wrong in this man.

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From Jesus’ answer we can tell what was wrong with this guy. From Jesus’ answer we can tell he was like a teenage boy at a 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade when soldiers march by. He sees the uniforms and medals, the ribbons and the weapons and he says, “I want to be a soldier. I’ll go anywhere. I’ll do anything.” But he is forgetting the reality of a soldier’s life – the deployments, the absence from loved ones, the total commitment to honor and sacrifice.

So Jesus said to him, “**Foxes have dens, birds have nests, but the Son of Man** (who you are trying to follow) **has no place to lay his head...** Discipleship

truth #1 – Following Jesus is not going to be easy. Just like Jesus was rejected in Samaria, we will be rejected because of our beliefs.

The second guy walks up to Jesus. He had already been a follower of Jesus, but now Jesus is calling him to a deeper level of service – he was calling him to go and spread the good news of Jesus to the world. This man says, “Jesus sure, **but first let me go and bury my father.**” Sounds like a reasonable request, doesn’t it?

And yet, **sometimes when you walk with Jesus you hear surprising things.**

Jesus said, “**Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.**”

What does that mean?

Well, probably two options: either this man’s father was at that point dead, or, perhaps more likely, this man’s father was elderly. He was saying, “Let me go home, take care of my aging dad, when he dies, then Jesus I will come and follow you.”

Discipleship truth #2 – Jesus’ call to follow him is a call that doesn’t just say deny yourself material things (like foxes have holes and birds have nests). He’s saying his call is one where he wants our hearts. He claims our heart as his and says, “I want all of you. And following me is more important than the most important things in your life. Following me takes precedence over everyone else in your life... even if they are family.”

The last would-be disciple of Jesus says, “**I will follow you, but first let me go and say goodbye to my family.**” Again, that seems reasonable. In our first lesson for today we heard Elisha say words almost exactly like that, and that didn’t seem to be a problem there.

**But when you walk with Jesus, sometimes you are surprised by what you hear.**

The problem here wasn’t his words. The problem was his heart.

You see, he thought of following Jesus as a duty – something he had to do. “Jesus I’ll do that thing, but first let me say goodbye and I’ll come back and do this.”

Jesus said, “Following me isn’t a duty.” And if we think that, we have not yet begun to understand what he is calling us too. You are wanting to look back at what you are leaving behind and think that you are doing some great deed by leaving it behind, and so he said, “**No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.**”

Not many of you have plowed, I suppose, a few perhaps. All of you have probably cut lawn; you don’t make a nice straight cut by looking back over your shoulder, do you? The guys at Miller Park who make that nice pattern in the outfield don’t do it by turning around and looking back.

Discipleship truth #3 - A call to service is a call to look forward, not backward – not a call to look at what we’ve left behind as if it was our duty and therefore to our credit to give up those things, but to look forward to what Jesus is calling us too.

Did you notice that the Bible doesn’t record how these three men responded? Kind of interesting. Jesus lay’s out these three truths to discipleship: Following Jesus is not going to be easy, it’s going to mean loving Jesus more than anything, even your family, and then remember that it is not a duty but a privilege because of the great thing Jesus has put in front of you, but he doesn’t tell us how these three men responded.

That’s because the point of God’s Word here is not how those men answered. The point is, how will you answer? How will you answer when Jesus calls?

You know, when we hear Jesus say these surprising things, I couldn’t blame you if you thought Jesus was asking for a lot. He’s asking us to leave behind nice things like cars, and homes, and vacations. He’s asking us to leave behind this crazy thought that family is the most important thing in the world.

I wouldn’t blame you if you wanted to look over your shoulder and say, “Jesus, those are good things aren’t they? You gave them to me, didn’t you? Those things are important to me.”

Friends, don’t ever mistake his call to be one of duty. The call to follow Jesus isn’t a call to duty. It is a call from the darkness to the light. Jesus is calling you to something far, far better. Our problem is we never stop to look at what he calls us too. We look at the thing he calls us to leave behind and say, “That’s a lot! I love these things Lord!”

There is this great little bit by C. S. Lewis explained why we are so often half-hearted in our following of Jesus. Our service to God is so often half-hearted because the other half is busy fooling around with sex, ambition, pride, and stuff. And that’s a shame because this half-heartedness means we are missing out on infinite joys that Jesus has laid before us.

C. S. Lewis says we are like an ignorant child from a slum in a third world country, making mud pies who doesn’t want to leave them because he doesn’t understand what is offered when someone offers to take him on a vacation to a sea-side resort. “I like my mud pies. I’ll keep making them here. You go on without me. You’re asking a lot to leave these mud pies behind.”

But Jesus is offering us something far, far better than even the best things in your life.

Keep this in mind: Jesus is walking to Jerusalem. He is walking there that he might die on a cross to forgive you for all the times you put those other things before him, for all the times we follow Jesus half-heartedly or because we thought it

was our duty to do so. Jesus died on the cross to forgive you. He’s washed your slate clean. He calls you his own dear child. Don’t ever forget where he was heading.

Remember what Luke said? “**The time approached for him to be taken up into heaven.**” He was getting ready to leave this world and go back to the kingdom that is waiting for you. So when he calls you to follow, he’s not just calling to you follow him to a cross in Jerusalem - to a life of sacrifice and duty. He’s calling to follow him all the way to the place where he will make you understand that those things you thought were so important were nothing more than little mud pies. Jesus has something grand in store for you.

**When you walk with Jesus, you hear some surprising things.**

Today he calls you. He calls you to a life here that finds its fulfillment in him. He calls you to a life here that can be lived all-in in following him because you understand what Jesus has won for you in the next life. And he calls you to a life that never ends in a kingdom that will never fade. Let’s leave the mud pies behind. Let’s follow him all the way.

God grant it. Amen.