**June 26, 2022 Luke 9:51-62**

***A Crooked Furrow***

**Scripture: *Luke 9:51-62 NRSV***

*(51)When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. (52)And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; (53)but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. (54)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?" (55)But he turned and rebuked them. (56)Then they went on to another village. (57)As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." (58)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." (59)To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." (60)But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." (61)Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." (62)Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*

**Notes:**

1. Jesus calls people, whether their life is a moral ***disaster*** or a moral ***example***.
   1. Jesus wants all people, to become his ***disciples***.
   2. Set aside behavior that is ***unethical***.
   3. Jesus asserts his ***priority***.
   4. Discipleship has ***priority***.
   5. The one invited to discipleship must ***follow***.
2. When we maintain a lifestyle that ***interferes*** with discipleship, we are really ***cheating*** God.
   1. For Jesus, family plannings stand or fall on whether they ***promote*** or ***hinder*** discipleship.
   2. He’s inviting us into a deeper ***allegiance*** to himself.
   3. He wants us to find our true ***freedom*** in him.
   4. What we call love and duty is sometimes what Jesus knows to be our ***refusal*** to die to self.
   5. It’s unsettling to follow Christ in a culture that ***debases*** the family and yet puts it on a ***pedestal***.
3. Jesus still calls us! And we can still ***answer***!
   1. ***Make*** ***time*** available to be in service to Jesus.
   2. ***Focus*** on your Christian walk.
   3. Avoid the ***distractions*** and keep your eyes fixed on Jesus.

**Script:**

Have any of you noticed that in the last year or so an increase in spam callers; you know the calls that your auto warranty is about to expire, or your utility company has charged you too much, maybe the IRS is trying to contact you about an outstanding fine? It is almost to a point where I don’t want to answer the phone anymore. I even catch myself looking at the caller ID before answering the phone, and only doing so if I recognize the number. I have even heard of some people receiving calls from the very phone number that they are being called on.

If you are like me, you probably aren’t too quick to answer the call. I understand that we are tired of everybody calling us with their hand out, wanting us to help them with some expense, and we are having trouble enough on our own to make ends meet.

But what about when Jesus calls? How do you respond when Jesus calls, how quick are we to pick up the phone when Jesus calls? Today I would like to consider why we don’t pick up when Jesus calls. Let’s begin by looking at our Passage from Luke 9:51-62, stand with me as we share in the reading of God’s word.

***Luke 9:51-62 NRSV (51)When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. (52)And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; (53)but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. (54)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?" (55)But he turned and rebuked them. (56)Then they went on to another village. (57)As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." (58)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." (59)To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." (60)But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." (61)Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." (62)Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."***

There may be some of us sitting here today that think like this: “I’m a good person.” “I don’t abuse my spouse, children, or anybody else. I don’t shortchange my employer or cheat on my income tax. I’m not a substance abuser and I don’t have a criminal record. I keep my lawn mowed, and I help people in my neighborhood. I get to church pretty often, even on a humid summer Sunday, and I give to charitable causes.” “I’m not a bad person. In fact, I’m a pretty good person. And because I am, Jesus has the sense not to ask me to do anything different than what I’m doing.” “Besides, Jesus must be plenty busy trying to drag home people who have gone astray. Wife beaters. Prostitutes. Drug dealers. White-collar criminals.  Derelicts.” “The pretty good life that I live amounts to an insurance policy that Jesus is not going to go poking his head into my business and ask me to do something different than what I’m doing. He may even send me a thank-you note for my good behavior.” Some of us sitting here may have thought some of these statements.

But this type of thinking is a bit askew, its wrong. Jesus has a habit of calling people, whether their life is a moral disaster or a moral example; and some of us find that annoying. This is because he is interested in something besides improving bad people’s behavior. What interests him is more personal. He wants all people, each and every one of us and those around us, regardless of their behavior, to become his disciples. Sometimes this requires us to set aside behavior that is unethical, even criminal. This is the stuff of dramatic conversion stories. The murderer, the drug dealer, the gang leader, the alcoholic, the drug addict; all of them come to faith and live a different life. In these cases, Jesus asserts his priority over the worst in human experience. Drop the switchblade, the bottle, the needle; and lift high the cross!

But for other people, answering the call to discipleship means setting aside what is good, or at least what is legal and respectable. The parent, the doctor, the business leader all come to faith and live differently than before. Their old lifestyles have been scrambled. Jesus asserts his priority, not only over the worst in human experience, but over the rest as well. Drop the sporting events, drop the theater tickets, and lift high the cross!

Our passage today offers us insight into this perplexing process. Jesus is interviewing candidates for discipleship. One candidate asks permission to return home and bury his father. The father may be dead already. More likely, the candidate wants to put off discipleship until he has seen his father through old age and into the cemetery. In any case, Jesus does not give permission. Discipleship has priority.  There is somebody else to care for this father; somebody else to bury him.  The one invited to discipleship must follow.

Another candidate makes a similar, but less dramatic appeal: “Let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Here again, Jesus gives a thumbs-down. This person too needs to hit the discipleship road, and do so immediately. What Jesus says at this point sounds perplexing. ***"No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*** However, consider this, when an animal is pulling the plow, the farmer must watch a fixed point ahead in order to plow a straight line. Looking back when plowing causes the farmer to swerve. The result is a crooked furrow, the mark of an amateur. The furrow remains for the entire season, and makes the farmer look foolish. To look back while on the discipleship road is just as foolish.

So, what is Jesus really saying? When we try to maintain a lifestyle that interferes with our call to be disciples, we are really cheating God. Jesus respects marriage, matter of fact He speaks out against divorce, and pays attention to children. He honors the family; but he does not make an idol out of it. For Jesus, family arrangements stand or fall on whether they promote or hinder discipleship.

Jesus may call us out of the wreckage of our lives. Yet he may also call us out of what we consider to be the good life, the American dream fulfilled. In each case, he’s inviting us into a deeper allegiance to himself. Jesus wants to break down our addictions, whether to drugs, alcohol, material possessions, success, or even respectability. He wants us to find our true freedom in him. It is to this he calls us, and invites us; it would be a shame if we were to see Jesus' name on our caller ID and refuse to pick up. Our way is to follow Jesus, on His way to Jerusalem, on His way to the cross, and beyond.

Yet so many times it is so very easy to come up with excuses. Some excuses can sound profoundly moral. But what we call love and duty is sometimes what Jesus knows to be the voice of addiction speaking, our fear of a different future, or our refusal to die to our self so that we may live for Him.

Many times, we don’t want to end the life we are living. We may not want to stop our slavery to possessions. After all, if we stop, we may end up thankful to God for simple gifts. If we stop, we may want God more than we want to go shopping. It can be confusing to our way of life and can unsettle us when we decide to follow Christ in a consumer culture.

We may not want to stop our worship of our family. After all, if we stop, we may recognize members of our family as people in their own right, living lives outside our own. If we stop our worship of who we think they are, then we may struggle to love them for who, in fact, they really are. It’s unsettling to follow Christ in a culture that debases the family and yet puts it on a pedestal.

But the most treacherous addiction is not to fantasies about the family or to alluring, expensive stuff. The most insidious addiction is to cheap religion, Christianity without a cross. There have been times when Christianity has focused on the cross to the neglect of the resurrection; when Christianity focused on penitence to the neglect of forgiveness, when Christianity focused on the need to die to self to the neglect of God’s grace. That’s not the problem now, however; the problem now, or should I say, the distortion, is a friendly Jesus with no wounds in his hands, a religion that denies suffering rather than travel through it.

And so in today’s Gospel one candidate for discipleship pipes up and declares: ***"I will follow you wherever you go."***  Jesus answers him in a funny way. He doesn’t accept or reject him. Instead, he counsels him. ***"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."*** Jesus talks about lodging and accommodations. Wild animals have their places to stay; but Jesus is left to travel with no place to call his own. Jesus talks about accommodations because he doesn’t take this candidate’s sweeping statement at face value. This one won’t follow Jesus just anywhere.  He will follow Jesus wherever he, the candidate, wants to go, some place with comfortable accommodations.

And so, Jesus lets him down easy. He knows he and this candidate aren’t following the same path. The candidate wants to go where he wants to go and Jesus, well Jesus is going where his Father wants him to go, and soon Jesus will have a place to rest his head–inside a borrowed tomb.

Today I’ve talked about excuses. Most of us, when Jesus calls us, we pull out one excuse or another. We have our favorite excuses; we have our favorite addiction. We may be living an immoral life. We may be addicted to material items, or to our private view of what family should be, or maybe even to cheap religion, Christianity with no cross, but a really friendly and loving Jesus. The grace is that Jesus still calls us! And we can still answer!

What makes you faithful is not utter freedom from excuse-making, complete deliverance from addiction, but instead the realization that God remains bigger than your particular bogeymen; that Jesus is inviting you to discipleship in a voice louder and sweeter and more insistent than the most potent excuses. The question remains, what are you going to choose; discipleship, or your chores; discipleship, or your children’s play dates; Discipleship or your downtime? The fact is when you choose to place some item, whether it is an event, an item, or a person above the call of God, this is called idolatry. And most of you will recognize the commandment that says, “you shall have no other Gods before me.” And Idolatry is placing other items above God in your list of priorities.

Lets face it, we make time for the things that are our priorities, and the things at the top of our lists are where we make sure to devote time. We must be making time available to be in service to Jesus, time for discipleship, time for personal evangelism, and time for fellowship. We must be focused on our Christian walk and the things that tend to draw our attention away from it, curving our furrow and drawing us away from God? Avoid the distractions and keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. Place Jesus at the top of your priority list, above all else.

*Psalms 16:1-11 NRSV (1)Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge. (2)I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you." (3)As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight. (4)Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips. (5)The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. (6)The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage. (7)I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. (8)I keep the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. (9)Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure. (10)For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit. (11)You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*