

“Be Homeless and Forget Funerals”

“Jesus Said That?!” part 3

Luke 9:57-62

[57] I want to thank Ed Myers for filling in for me last week. It’s good when our congregation steps outside their comfort zones and allows God to lead them.

I am grateful you are all here this morning. You have chosen to worship God in this place. Whether is out of habit or this is your first time here, you will find the church is God’s gift to us. We’ve come to worship God – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and connect with each other, in good times and bad. You belong in this place.

Would you please join me in prayer? Holy Spirit, come and fill this place. Fall upon us as you did in the days of the first disciples. Teach us what it truly means to trust Jesus as Savior and follow him as Lord. Let the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, God. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

You might be a little confused about my message title today, “Be Homeless and Forget Funerals.” We are in the middle of a series about some hard things Jesus said, looking at the context in which they were written, as well as the applications they have for us today.

[58] This morning we have a three-for one deal, three difficult sayings of Jesus in Luke 9. Jesus basically says, #1 – “Be Homeless.” #2 – “Forget Funerals.” And #3 – “Don’t Say Goodbye.” All these were said to potential disciples, would-be followers of Jesus.

Have you ever played “Simon Says”? You know the rules. When Simon Says “Go”, you go. When Simon Says “Stop”, you stop. And you don’t listen to anyone else. Faith is supposed be like that. We sing, “Where He leads me, I will follow.” Yet many say they are Christians but seem to have trouble obeying Jesus. They say they believe in God, but it’s more like a Simon Says game where they never move. The word “Christian” literally means “little Christ” – yet some Christians are not following Jesus at all.

[59] Notice how this passage in Luke 9 starts off with “As they were walking along the road...” (Luke 9:57) If you’ve ever been hiking, you know that following

your leader is a critical skill. A few years ago, my family and I hiked some pretty strenuous, narrow trails on high elevations in California. But Katja and I made sure...OK, mostly Katja...made sure that we didn't ask our children to take on more than they could handle. Jesus is like that – he is not asking us to do more than we are capable of, but he does ask us to follow him.

In Luke 9, three people say that they are ready to follow Jesus, but in reality, each has an excuse or obstacle to overcome.

[60] The first one says to Jesus, “I will follow you wherever you go.” To follow a Jewish rabbi or a teacher means to walk in their footsteps, literally and figuratively. The student learns the wisdom of the rabbi and becomes like him, traveling wherever their rabbi goes, listening and living the same way.

Jesus seems to know this man won't live up to his promise. The man won't go everywhere with Jesus. Jesus says, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” (Luke 9:58) Essentially, “to be my disciple you have to be willing to be homeless.” Jesus traveled wherever God wanted him to go. His ministry was not a life of comfort. There were no Holiday Inns! This first would-be follower wasn't willing to give up his security and shelter to follow Jesus.

It's somewhat ironic. Jesus said in Matthew 6, we shouldn't worry; God takes care of the sparrows and flowers. God will always give us what we need, though not always what we want. I don't think Jesus is literally telling this man to be a homeless wanderer. Jesus is saying, be ready for inconvenience and discomfort in your calling.

[61] When I was a freshman in high school, my youth group took a mission trip to Mexico. We served in the slums of Reynosa for an entire week, building houses for the homeless. We stayed in a Catholic center that was sparse and simple – the only things plentiful were cockroaches. Yet at the end of the trip, we stayed three days at a hotel on South Padre Island, Texas. After spending so much time and effort among people with so little, we indulged in luxury. I admit, I struggled with guilt about that excursion.

I don't believe you must become a penniless hermit to follow Jesus. But I do believe Christians should embrace inconvenience. Following Jesus takes time, money, energy and humility. When we follow Jesus without excuses or

complaining, the world notices. The world noticed Mother Teresa because she embraced poverty to serve others in the name of Christ. As Christians, we must be ready to embrace discomfort.

[62] When the next candidate steps up, Jesus speaks directly to him. “Follow me.” The response? “Sure thing, Jesus, just let me go back and bury my father.”

“Forget funerals,” Jesus says. Literally, Jesus says, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:60)

This is really a weird exchange. I have presided at over 50 funerals in 8 years. Never once did someone stand up in the middle of the service and say, “Sorry, I don’t have time for this. I have to follow Jesus.” How can the dead even bury the dead, literally?

Jesus is using hyperbole – exaggeration to make a point. Eventually – maybe weeks, months, or even years later – this man’s father would die, and when the funeral was over, he would start following Jesus. This is the classic, “When I get around to it” excuse. And Jesus doesn’t accept it.

[63] We have all heard this excuse before. It comes in many forms:

“I’ll make time for God after I finish college and get a job.”

“We’ll go to church when my kids are older.”

“I’ll get serious about Jesus after my children grow up.”

“I’ll start thinking more about faith after I retire.”

[64] None of those excuses hold up in the Bible. Ecclesiastes 12:1 says to honor God with your youth, before you get old. Proverbs 22:6 says to raise your children in the way they should go, so that when they are old, they will continue on that path. 2nd Corinthians 6:2 tells us, “Now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation!” We are never supposed to delay our decision to follow Christ. If we do that, we reject the power of Christ in our most formative years.

My children practice their sports and dancing because they want to get better. When it comes to following Jesus and growing in faith, the same principle applies. The sooner we start, the better.

Jesus’ second message is not literally about funerals, it’s about priorities. It’s about making time to serve Christ. Time is the one resource that we all get

equal amounts of. The difference is how we choose to spend it. Will we follow Jesus, or procrastinate?

“Be Homeless and Forget Funerals!” Not literally. Jesus instructs us to embrace inconvenience and not procrastinate.

[65] Finally, the last would-be disciple offers Jesus this excuse. “I am ready to follow you, Lord; just give me a moment to say goodbye to my family.” Jesus simply says, “Don’t.” Read verse 62 again: “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of heaven.”

[66] OK, I get the point of embracing discomfort and not procrastinating. But now Jesus is really messing with me. Really, Jesus? Don’t say goodbye to my family first? (Actually, this might be a good thing for me. Saying goodbye is too mushy, anyway.)

I don’t think this “disciple” merely wanted to say goodbye to his family. He was hesitating, wondering if maybe he should get permission from his family first. Maybe he had a lucrative job, and wondered if his boss would hold his position open for him, in case this following Jesus thing didn’t work out. Jesus basically told him, “You’ve got to be all in. There is no second guessing following me.”

[67] Jesus is not literally saying, “Don’t kiss mom and dad goodbye.” What he is saying is this: nothing should stop you from following Jesus. Not your job. Not your past. Not even family. Those things can only stop you if you let them. Following Jesus has to be your top priority.

Honestly, I love my family. I know that God wants me to honor them. I didn’t choose to leave them to follow Christ. But there are times in my faith when I have to choose my priorities carefully. And the beautiful thing is, my family supports me in honoring God. My first three priorities in life are God, my family, and my career, in that order.

Raise your hand if Jesus has ever messed up your life. He has mine. Because of Christ, I left a profitable career in engineering. Instead I threw my lot in with those crazy Christians trying to navigate churches in flux and generations of people who don’t know Jesus yet. I’ve been unemployed, lived in six different towns in 18 years, changed my career, moved my family, and ventured into the unknown wilderness of the Upper Peninsula to follow Jesus and lead the church. In many ways, I am crazy.

But I’ve never doubted that it was the right decision to follow Jesus, even if it had never led to becoming a pastor. I have followed Christ because he loves me. He lives for me. He has provided forgiveness, strength, encouragement, and comfort in my hardest times. Jesus has shown me a family of believers who call on his name and who make it their life goal to live for him, not for comfort and convenience. If I’m messed up, I’m in good company. [68] Even the Apostle Paul, who was accused of being crazy (Acts 26:24) had this to say about his life:

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him... ¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:7-11)

Paul had no confidence in any other part of his life except for Jesus. What about us? Do we have to be perfect to follow Jesus? Goodness, no! The original twelve disciples wanted to call down fire from heaven on a Samaritan town! (Luke 9:51-56) That’s not exactly merciful, “What Would Jesus Do?” type behavior. Jesus had to rebuke them, work on their imperfections and mold them into a world-changing force: the church. That is our faith inheritance, too.

[69] So the question really is this: Do you see yourself as a follower of Jesus? Or are you just a spectator? When it gets hard, will you go back to your creature comforts, or will you keep walking, keep working, keep plowing?

God’s grace is free. The blood of Jesus covers our sin. That will always be true. We don’t earn God’s favor. But we can’t be content to just let the cross be just another good story. The cross is powerful. It changes us, prompts us, provokes us, challenges us. If your life isn’t messy, if you don’t embrace inconvenience, are you really a disciple?

[70] Love your family...but first follow Jesus. Grieve and comfort others...but first follow Jesus. Use your resources to help Jesus save the world, not to indulge in comfort or convenience. It’s inconvenient to be a camp

counselor, a Sunday School teacher, a lay reader, or a pastor. It's inconvenient to invite people to worship. It's inconvenient to give to causes of justice, mercy and fighting poverty in places you will probably never go. It's inconvenient to pray in public. It's inconvenient to resist responding in anger when you're hurt. It's inconvenient to change your life!

And that's exactly the point. Discipleship was never about convenience. It's about commitment. It's about responding to the grace of Jesus Christ. Each of us should live our life so that our actions will say, Jesus is our number one priority. If we all do this, no one will wonder if they missed an opportunity to follow this amazing rabbi. Let's pray.

Memory verse

Luke 9:62 – “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

Reflection questions

1. What is the most “inconvenient” part of following Jesus for you?
2. How has God “freely given” to you? How have you acknowledged what God has given you?
3. What benefits do you experience as a disciple of Jesus?
4. What priorities in your life need to change to be fully committed to Christ?