

Luke Chapter 9 vs 57-61

Well, I'm sure we've all had lots of invitations to various functions over the years, from an informal verbal invitation to a friendly catch up over coffee to a more formal written invitation to attend a wedding or other similar event. It's probably not long after receiving that invitation, if you're anything like me, that you start to think of all the things you need to do before you can possibly attend the event let alone reply. For instance, but first I must find something to wear, I wonder who else will be there? what will the occasion be like? and the list goes on. In fact, we probably wouldn't dream of taking up any invitation without first engaging in some sort of preparation - a but first, or we may even make up an excuse not to go.

Now, our invitation to follow Jesus requires none of this preparation, just a willingness to truly follow him. He wants us to meet him and follow him just as we are - he will and does meet us amongst the messiness and chaos of our everyday lives as well as when we are prepared and sit or kneel in prayer on a Sunday morning.

Let's remind ourselves of the scene in our reading - the first man says he will follow Jesus wherever he goes and Jesus gives a seemingly odd reply of "foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" What does that mean?

In verses 59-60 we see the second man who in his response to Jesus' invitation to follow says "but Lord, first let me go and bury my father" to which Jesus replies "let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God". Then in verse 61-62 we see yet a third person willing to follow, but with a but first of going back to say goodbye to his family. Again, Jesus replies with a riddle of a response when he says, "No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God".

Why wasn't Jesus just delighted that people were willing to follow him rather than giving them these strange responses why wasn't he saying "that's great news, I'm delighted come with me then" much as we would respond today if we'd asked a non-Christian friend to come to church for the first time and they agreed to come along to one of our services.

In order to answer or make sense of Jesus' responses we must consider the cost of true discipleship and zoom out from our passage and look at the middle of the chapter where, in verse 23 Jesus clearly spells out to his disciples what it really means to follow him. He says, "whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me". In other words Jesus has already explained to his disciples (before the events of our reading) that if they really want to follow him they must be prepared to pay the cost that this brings, they must forget their own agendas (in our reading, burying their father or saying goodbye to family) and put Jesus first - they are to deny themselves. Then they must carry their cross daily which for us could mean to be prepared to face opposition or even ridicule when we talk about our faith, or maybe becoming more

disciplined in our bible study and prayer time, or giving up on the offer of an outing in favour of spending time with our church family or even learning to put any worries we may have in God's hands rather than letting them cast a shadow over our relationship with Jesus. We should then be prepared to follow after him, endeavour to become more like him and to be committed to announcing the Kingdom of God, the Good News of the Gospels at every opportunity we have.

So getting back to Jesus's strange responses to the three who were offering to follow him, I think the conclusion we must draw is that in reality these men may have been making up excuses not to follow straight away -the first man's father, in all probability, had not died, or may not even have been unwell, it is obviously not unreasonable to want to attend a family funeral or to say goodbye to family and friends before embarking on a journey. But the real message here is that we do need to be clear about who Jesus is and what the real cost of following him is - remember these people were actually face to face with him but still didn't fully understand what was to happen, this was all before the crucifixion and resurrection and although Jesus had spoken about what would happen, they didn't understand or didn't accept what he was telling them. We, on the other hand, have the benefit of being able to read and study the wonderful eye-witness accounts and teachings that we find in the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament as well as the prophecies and stories of the Old Testament to give us much more information of the reasons Jesus became the incarnate son of God, lived among us before being crucified and resurrected and ascended into Heaven. We have a much fuller knowledge and therefore understanding of what Jesus was talking about when he spoke to the disciples about future events and therefore in

our desire to follow Jesus and to proclaim the Kingdom of God, we should be more aware of what those costs might be.

I think it's also important to remember that we have the additional blessing of being guided by God's Holy Spirit - remember Jesus telling his disciples in Matthew Chapter 28 that he would be with them til the end of the age? And although this was after the resurrection, they had still not been blessed by the power of the Holy Spirit which came later at Pentecost and so were probably still relying or believing that Jesus in a physical sense would be with them always. Again, although we are living 2000 years after these events and have not come face to face with the physical presence of God, we have the considerable advantage of being able to look to our bibles to see the whole picture, as Vaughan Roberts calls it in the title of his book - God's Big Picture.

So, going back to the original text of our reading today and to the way we as individuals may respond to invitations, especially those from God - are we prepared to forget our but firsts and put Jesus at the top of all our agendas? Are we really aware of the importance of following him - after all he is the way to God, and without him we have no chance of a relationship with Our Father. Are we ready to do this without looking back - the wording of Jesus in our reading was "no one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the Kingdom of God" or as William Barclay puts it - "The Christian marches on, not to the sunset, but to the dawn. The watchword of the Kingdom is not backwards but forwards". I find it both exciting and humbling that God is prepared to offer such remarkable chances to people like me and you who no matter how hard we try, are

still sinners and must rely wholly on our father God, his Son and his Holy spirit who are indeed with us always - Remember, foxes have holes and birds have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

Amen